

SMALL ISLAND BIG SONG

MAR 21 / Cobb Great Hall

COMPANY

Sammy

Merina heritage,
Madagascar
Songwriter & Performer

Richard Mogu

Magi heritage, Papua
New Guinea
Songwriter & Performer

Aremistic

Tahitian heritage, Tahiti
(French Polynesia)
Songwriter & Performer

Mea Joy Ingram

Motu heritage, Papua
New Guinea & Australia
Songwriter & Performer

Yuma Pawang

Atayal heritage, Taiwan
Songwriter & Performer

Mathieu Joseph

Creole heritage, Mauritius
Choreographer &
Performer

Sam Roem

Wamena heritage, West
Papua & Indonesia
Songwriter & Performer



View the digital program at
whartoncenter.com/program

Program will be announced from stage.

Run time is approximately 120 minutes, with one intermission.

Media Partner: Michigan Radio

ABOUT SMALL ISLAND BIG SONG

Be prepared to have your view of islander music shattered, as leading artists of the blue continent, the Pacific & Indian oceans unite in a powerful and timely cultural statement, a voice for our changing seas – ‘Our Island.’

Small Island Big Song is a collaboration between artists of Island nations drawing from their shared seafaring heritage to unite the Pacific & Indian Oceans. The performance, ‘Our Island,’ brings together some of the most prominent artists of Taiwan, Madagascar, Mauritius, Papua New Guinea, and Tahiti, who have made a choice to maintain the cultural voice of their people, to sing in the language, and to play the instruments of their land. These unique lineages mixed with their diverse contemporary styles—roots-reggae, beats, folk, and spoken word—establish a contemporary musical dialogue between cultures, drawing on their ancestral lineage to confront contemporary issues with a

hope driven vision of the future. Framed with live visuals filmed across 16 island nations on a three-year field trip by the project's co-founders, creating "Beautiful cinematography and incredible music, one coherent, jaw-dropping piece" as described by Rob Schwartz (*Billboard*).

Motivated by their concerns for the ocean, a couple, Taiwanese theater producer BaoBao Chen and Australian music producer/filmmaker Tim Cole, quit their jobs after hearing the predicted effects of climate change to the oceanic nations, and spent the following eight years recording and filming over a hundred artists on 16 island nations, layering up songs from island to island. Outcomes include two award-winning albums, a feature film, impact program, and two world-touring productions.

Music critic Tom Orr has noted in the RootsWorld review "Small Island Big Song sound like one very big, very happy family doing what they do best while helping get the word out on a most serious issue."

Notes from the Co-Founders

"How can we respond to the issue of our era, our planet's future as theater and music creators?"

Culture is the framework through which we understand our relationship to our social and physical environments.

It is our shared patterns of behavior, interactions, and beliefs. Fluid, ever evolving and whether we are aware of it or not, it is the core of our guiding personal narratives, our sense of self.

Our dominant global culture is failing us. Our planet's natural ecosystem on which we depend for our very survival, is collapsing around us. The evidence is tangible, lived, and indisputable. Yet we fail to respond with the resolve and urgency that nature, that our future generations demand.

Those of the ocean have maintained successful communities on fragile islands for countless generations and their cultural lineage embodies this. Small Island Big Song is an ensemble of such people, artists who against the mainstream have made a choice to sing foremost in the language and maintain the musical sensibilities of their heritage. They are the songkeepers continuing an unbroken cultural lineage back to their first ancestors to step, sleep, die and be born on their homelands. Their music embodies this knowledge, and as with music itself, it is only revealed through movement as it is shared, through your listening it lives.

Some of us will lose our island homes to rising sea levels and all of us are witnessing the death of our reefs and disappearing sea life, it's soul destroying. Our response is to share that loss in song, supporting each other and you, the listener, but also to celebrate nature and our

cultures. We do live in extraordinarily beautiful places, and we want to share that, too. We have to, for our island we all share.

—Small Island Big Song co-founders BaoBao Chen and Tim Cole

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Songwriter & Performer | Sammy – Merina heritage, Madagascar

Sammy followed his passion for Madagascar's musical heritage by mastering and learning how to make most of Madagascar's instruments. His efforts came to the notice of the UK's world music scene as his band, 'Tarika Sammy,' gained international recognition, becoming a regular on major festival stages and being acknowledged as one of the world's "Best Ten Bands," alongside U2, by *TIME* Magazine. Small Island Big Song (SIBS) met Sammy at his house during their inspiring field trips to Madagascar in 2016 and 2017. He's featured in both albums and concert tours around the world since 2018.

Songwriter & Performer | Aremistic – Tahitian heritage, Tahiti (French Polynesia)

Like the lively uplifting Tahitian rhythm he was named after, Aremistic's music could have only come from one

island, Tahiti. A natural fusion of the island's cultural mix grounded in his Tahitian heritage, Aremistic's songs and performances integrate traditional Polynesian instruments and rhythms with reggae, hip-hop, rock, folk, and pop sensibilities, often sung in Tahitian, French, and English in one song. His recent performances at Aotearoa/New Zealand's 'Pasifika festival' and in Europe and the USA expanded his reputation as a voice for the Pacific Ocean.

Songwriter & Performer | Yuma Pawang – Atayal heritage, Taiwan

Yuma, a member of the Atayal tribe of Taiwan, is a multidisciplinary artist expressing her thoughts on "Atayal," cultural preservation, transformation, essence, and social equity in film, music, painting and performance. With Taiwan's respected Minang performance group, she was invited by Indigenous nations of Northern Europe for a cultural exchange. This experience along with studying film performance made her aware of the significance of cultural practice in the context of Atayal life, where written language was historically limited.

Songwriter & Performer | Sam Roem – Wamena heritage, West Papua & Indonesia

Sam Roem is an Australian-based performing artist from West Papua. In 2006, with 40 other West Papuans, he

crossed over 600 miles of open seas to seek political asylum in Australia, sparking a diplomatic crisis. After graduating from Australia's Dance Academy, Sam has pursued a dynamic career in the arts drawing on his unique Papuan heritage, performing at The Sydney Opera House, Womadelaide, and BluesFest Byron Bay.

Songwriter & Performer | Richard Mogu – Magi heritage, Papua New Guinea

From the south coast of Papua New Guinea, Richard has been a feature musician in PNG for many years as a musician and producer in both traditional and contemporary styles. He's a master of traditional instruments including the Kwakumba flute, Garamut drumming, and PNG's iconic Kundu drums. Co-founder Tim Cole and Richard have been long-time collaborators; they met up again during SIBS's field trip to Papua New Guinea in 2016. He's featured in both SIBS's albums and concert world tours.

Songwriter & Performer | Mea Joy Ingram – Motu heritage, Papua New Guinea & Australia

Mea comes from a long line of drummers and dancers. She was taught by her father, master percussionist Airileke Ingram in the tradition of Manus Garamut, Cook Island Pate, and Gabagaba Motu Mavaru. The Garamut

drumming of PNG was traditionally an artform dominated by men, however Mea, having just turned 18, represents the new generation of female log drummers emerging from Oceania.

Choreographer & Performer | Mathieu Joseph – Creole heritage, Mauritius

Mathieu has been a professional dancer and choreographer since the age of 14 when he was discovered breakdancing on the suburban streets of Port Louis, Mauritius by renowned choreographer Stephen Bongarçon. Quickly embedding himself in Bongarçon's SRDance, his dedication earned him the gold medal for dance at "Les Jeux de la Francophonie" in 2009. Leading to a succession of shows and companies, including choreographing "Di Sel," a tribute to the salt workers of Mauritius which won the "Les Jeux de la Francophonie" in France in 2017.

ABOUT THE CO-FOUNDERS

Tim Cole - Australia

Director, Music producer, filmmaker

Tim Cole is an Australian music producer and filmmaker who's passionate about cross-cultural arts projects. He has produced numerous albums, films, and concerts for

Australian aboriginal, Torres Strait islander and Pacifica artists including Archie Roach, Telek, and Shellie Morris. He has also toured internationally with Circus Oz for eight years as theater and sound designer, with seasons on Broadway NYC & West End London. He was a senior music producer at CAAMA - Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association before beginning Small Island Big Song. Cole has received a Churchill fellowship and invitations to speak at the United Nations HQ, APAP NYC, and WOMEX.

BaoBao Chen - Taiwan

Producer, Manager

Having produced and managed Small Island Big Song's two multimedia concert productions, two award-winning albums, documentary, as well as curating world tours across 18 countries in Europe, the USA, Asia, and Oceania, BaoBao is one of Taiwan's most prominent producers of cross-cultural arts projects and an ISPA (International Society for the Performing Arts) fellow 2023-25. A vivid storyteller and fluent in English and Mandarin, she has a social media following of 130K+, and has been invited to speak at TEDx, WOMEX, APAP NYC, Stanford Live, and numerous arts festivals.

Creative & Production team

BaoBao Chen

Co-founder, Producer, Manager, Cinematography, Stage Manager

Tim Cole

Co-founder, Artistic Director, Visual Design, Cinematography, FOH Sound Engineer, VJ

Songwriters

Sammy, Mea Joy Ingram, Yuma Pawang, Aremistic, Mathieu Josep, Yoyo Tuki, Richard Mogu, Tim Cole

Kui Taruzaljum

Stage Sound Engineer

Nini Liu

Tour manager