

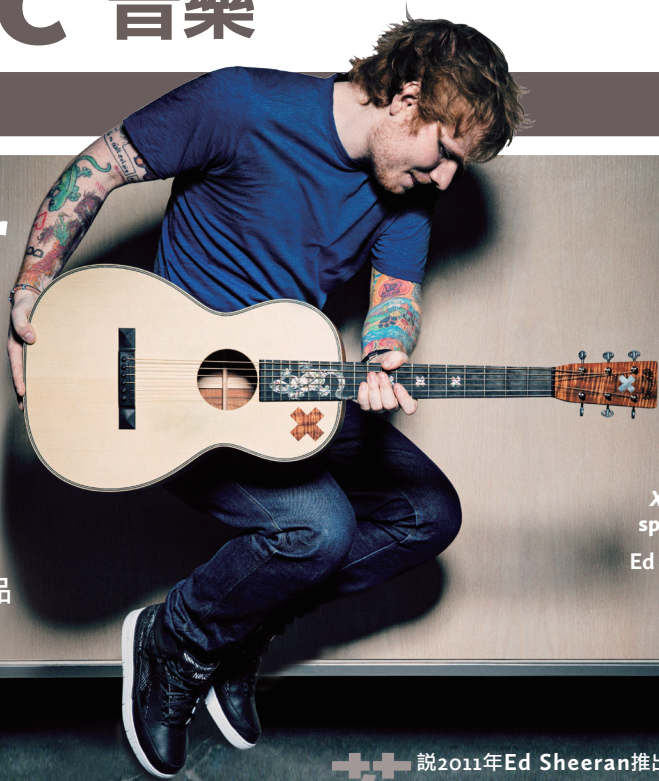


CD review 樂評

## The X factor 《X》係數

Everything adds up on the latest album by British singer-songwriter Ed Sheeran, writes Dorothy So

英國創作歌手Ed Sheeran在新專輯中銳意作出新嘗試，Dorothy So認為作品盡顯其才華橫溢



X marks the sweet spot for Ed Sheeran

Ed Sheeran在《X》中盡展創作天分

If Ed Sheeran's 2011 debut record, *+* (or "plus"), established him as a promising singer-songwriter, then his follow-up proves he's also one of the most versatile young artists to emerge in recent years.

Read as "multiply", *X* expands beyond Sheeran's usual repertoire of sensitive acoustic ballads. He dabbles in old-school R&B in the standout single *Sing* with the help of Pharrell Williams (one of the many A-list producers featured on the album). The prolific Neptunes frontman lends his signature electro-funk beats to this track and the result is a riff-driven jam that highlights Sheeran's smooth falsetto. In another instance of playing against type, the fresh-faced red-head flirts with hip-hop, rapping on several numbers including *The Man*.

Thematically, the album dwells on the pitfalls of romance, fame and the singer's apparent bad-boy ways. They're not wildly original topics but Sheeran manages to dress them up with his ebullient hooks and eccentric, earnest lyrics. Still, his songwriting talents find their truest outlet when he sidesteps conventional pop-rock tropes to address deeper matters. In *Runaway*, it's the pain of growing up in a dysfunctional household, sung over a bold and bluesy bassline. And in the album's closer, *Afire Love*, Sheeran delivers a beautifully profound eulogy to his late grandfather, who suffered from Alzheimer's.

Despite being just 23 years old, Sheeran has already developed a solid formula for mainstream musical success. If *X* is anything to go by, he's an artist who still has plenty of potential to grow.

若說2011年Ed Sheeran推出首張專輯《+》(加號)時，已成功地證明他是一位前途無限的創作歌手，那麼第二張專輯就進一步向樂迷證明他的多才多藝，乃是近年冒起新秀中的表表者。

Sheeran在新碟《X》(乘號)中突破他慣常的木結他抒情慢歌路線，在製作此專輯的其中一位金牌監製Pharrell Williams協助下，初次涉足老派節奏怨曲的領域，創作出優秀歌曲〈Sing〉。作為著名監製二人組Neptunes的靈魂人物，Williams今回大顯身手，在歌曲中加入招牌電子放克節拍，將同一樂句加上即興變化，突顯出Sheeran的假音流暢婉約。這個紅髮小子還在專輯中嘗試其他音樂類型，例如風格一轉大玩嘻哈，又在〈The Man〉等多首歌曲中發揮說唱技巧。

專輯主題環繞愛情陷阱、名利及Sheeran的壞男孩本色，雖是老生常談，但他以熱情洋溢的曲調及獨特而真摯的歌詞，巧妙地將其重新包裝。不過，他始終是在走出流行搖滾樂的框框後，才能充分發揮創作才華，從好幾首探究較深刻議題的作品中可見一斑。例如〈Runaway〉一曲，就在沉鬱而奔放的低音結他襯托下，唱出成長於破碎家庭的痛苦；而〈Afire Love〉更是Sheeran悼念生前患腦退化症的祖父的作品，曲詞優美，流露真摯哀傷。

儘管只有23歲，Sheeran顯然已找到攻佔主流樂壇的成功方程式，而《X》更是展示實力之作，從中可看到他未來的發展潛質不可限量。



Head over to the CD section to listen to Ed Sheeran's latest album, *X*  
請於「音樂專輯」收聽Ed Sheeran的最新專輯《X》

Photos: Ed Sheeran: Ben Watts