

Source: <https://musicmap.global/article/yes-no-wave-indonesia-interview>

## Yes No Wave

### **"You have to understand that this won't make you rich" - Wok the Rock explains how he built Indonesian netlabel Yes No Wave**

In 2007, Wok the Rock (real name Woto Wibowo) decided that the contemporary music scene in Indonesia needed to be taken seriously. Inspired by punk attitudes and the various open source, commons-orientated internet movements such as copyleft, he decided to give his country's underground, no wave, and avant garde artists a platform that was punk in practice as well as aesthetics.

The result, [Yes No Wave](#), has played a prominent role in redefining the outsider's idea of the culture of the Southeast Asian nation. More a curated platform of tunes than a corporate organisation, the netlabel has helped to bring the likes of [Senyawa](#), [White Shoes and The Couples Company](#), and [TerbujurKaku](#) to people's attention.

We tracked down Wok to Rock while he was touring Thailand with [Gabber Modus Operandi](#), the project's latest success story...

#### **Describe where you live in ten words or less.**

Yogyakarta, considered the centre of contemporary art in Indonesia

**You're well known as being the first Indonesian netlabel to gain attention from outside of your home country, and you've been a major voice more generally in promoting alternative systems of funding artists, etc. Who were your inspirations for the label, and what were you involved in prior to Yes No Wave that encouraged you to try this model?**

My very first inspiration came from [Carbon/Silicon](#), a band founded by Mick Jones and Tony James, who released their albums for free download in 2006. But I got my main inspiration when music file-sharing became very popular in Indonesia since early 2000s. I ran a punk label from 1999 to 2004. That ended because the fan community prefers to buy merch rather than releases; most of the kids copied the tapes from friends.

Then the MP3 format came out and they started to exchange files. This reminded me of our culture, where sharing is a tradition. So, rather than complaining about counterfeiting in the music industry, I moved toward cultural movements, and how to sustain this sort of thing economically. I am basically a visual artist interested in interdisciplinary works and collectivism. I am a member of an artist collective, and we live together and share any resources and networks between us.

There are many artist collectives in Indonesia, and has been since the 1940s. Based on these practices, I wanted to create a sharing platform for artists, where they could share their works openly and exchange it with their time, tools, skills, networks, while also earning some monetary through things like selling merchandise.

**Yes No Wave has been running for well over ten years now. What have you learnt in that time, and what advice would you give to others wanting to start their own label?**

After ten years, this label became big but I still want to keep it slow and small as usual. It's a cultural platform and it's dangerous if it becomes too closely involved in the music industry. For anyone who wants to do it like Yes No Wave has done, you have to understand that this won't make you rich. Make sure that your big expectation and hope is to promote music development in a social and cultural way.

**How would you describe the Yogyakarta music scene right now, who are the artists creating the most excitement?**

In the past 10 years, many indie and experimental bands have come out. Most of them are following idols such as Senyawa or Frau. Not many are delivering new styles in terms of music and concept. [Raja Kirik](#) and [Y-DRA](#) are two of the few artists who craft their ideas into strong content. But, the ecosystem is growing very well. Some venues, festivals, organizers, curators, and corporate sponsors are more open to underground artists and music now. Young artists are creating new critical initiatives to support the scene and are not falling into commercial pragmatism.

**And what parties or events should music fans head to if they want to check out those acts?**

We don't have a particular venue which exclusively shows experimental/progressive music. You can check out initiatives like: Jogja Noise Bombing, Bast Cultura (techno party); Yes No Klub (experimental music party); Kombo (improv session series led by Rully Shabara of Senyawa); Total Perkusi (percussion studio who also organize community-based events); Oxen Free; Tap House (bar who promotes interesting events in the weekend); artist collective spaces like Ruang MES 56, Ace House, Ruang Gulma, HONF, Survive! Garage, Lifepatch, Teater Garasi, and ArtJog (international contemporary arts festival); and Biennale Jogja (biannual global-south contemporary arts festival).

**If I Google "Indonesia" or "Yogyakarta" most of the material that pops up talks about the country's strong sense of tradition. Is this perception one you find yourself having to combat when you present yourselves as Indonesian artists elsewhere, or is it something you embrace?**

The most interesting [thing] about Yogyakarta is that both traditional art and contemporary art are living together and are both strong. Most of the contemporary artworks are based on local or traditional art practices in some way. The government and big media are still only promoting traditional arts and culture. In this sense, of course we are having to combat their direction. Though actually, they have changed a bit in the past five years. Something that we really want

to change is our own (post-)colonial attitude, where we think that “The West” is better and the only big thing we have is our traditional culture.

**What impact do you think the copyleft and free culture movements have had on (online) culture since you started?**

Well, free culture and copyleft ideas have grown naturally in Indonesia, as part of long traditions. That's why many people don't really understand what copyright is.

**Although inspiring ideas in theory, there is of course always the problem that online-based free culture relies on technology which generally raises money for corporations not overly interested or meaningfully invested in culture or music scenes etc. Do you think there's any way we will ever work ourselves out of this paradox?**

I don't think we can get rid of them. If we really wanted to, then we would have to create many small, networked, independent clusters. Or simply just do free culture as a way of life, as an attitude on a daily basis.

**If you could pick one piece of music to summarize and/or celebrate your home city or country, what would it be?**

Y-DRA starring Kiki PEA-Kombatan Aspal Gronjal

*Interview: Nicholas Burman*

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