

Iraqi rapper gives angry youth in Basra music outlet

By Nabil Al-Jurani and Aassim Abdul-Zahra

Music

A youth-led protest movement in the southern Iraqi port city of Basra, which saw riots last summer over failing services and soaring unemployment, has found an artistic outlet in the words and beats of homegrown rapper Ahmed Chayeb.

The 22-year-old rapper, also known as Mr Guti, says his generation is fed up with the false piety of politicians and religious authorities who preach about faith and duty but have let Basra fall apart.

"We need to be critical of everything that's not right," Chayeb told The Associated Press in a recent interview in his home studio, where he recorded "This is Basra", lashing out at the powerful Shiite religious establishment.

Mr Guti's expertly produced music videos have drawn tens of thousands of YouTube viewers but his new-found fame has also brought danger: threats from hard-liners are common and two of the city's protest organizers have been killed in recent attacks. Their killers remain at large.

Basra, long known around the Persian Gulf for its drinking establishments and its maritime vibe, fell under conservative rule after Shiite clerics and militias took over the city in the vacuum caused by the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq.

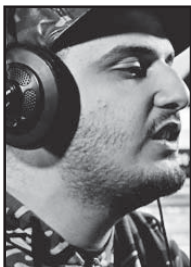
Once renowned for its canals and markets, Basra's waterways today

are clogged with waste, and its drinking water is filthy. The city erupted in violent unrest last summer that led to demonstrators burning down government and party-affiliated buildings.

Amid the revolt, rap offered Basra's youth – tired of joblessness and failed services – an opportunity for lyrics blistering with criticism.

Secure

In "This is Basra", Chayeb raps against the backdrop of a march around the city's burning municipal building during last summer's protests, asking why his generation has been called on to fight a war for leaders who cannot secure water for the city.



Chayeb

"We were martyred for this war, I fell, and the authority has forgotten my loyalty," he raps. "You're not associated with Hussein," he goes on, invoking the revered Shiite imam and grandson of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who died in the 7th century Battle of Karbala, and whose example Iraq's leaders have asked their youth to follow.

Chayeb, mindful of the dangers, is circumspect about where and when he performs. He says most of his concerts are arranged through private contacts; he stopped re-

cording at a professional studio in 2016. He said he's received death threats that have grown more intimidating in recent months. But he won't stop rapping.

Also:

LOS ANGELES: The Filipino boy band TNT Boys gained an extra member Tuesday night when pop-star Ariana Grande made a surprise appearance during the group's performance on "The Late Late Show With James Corden".

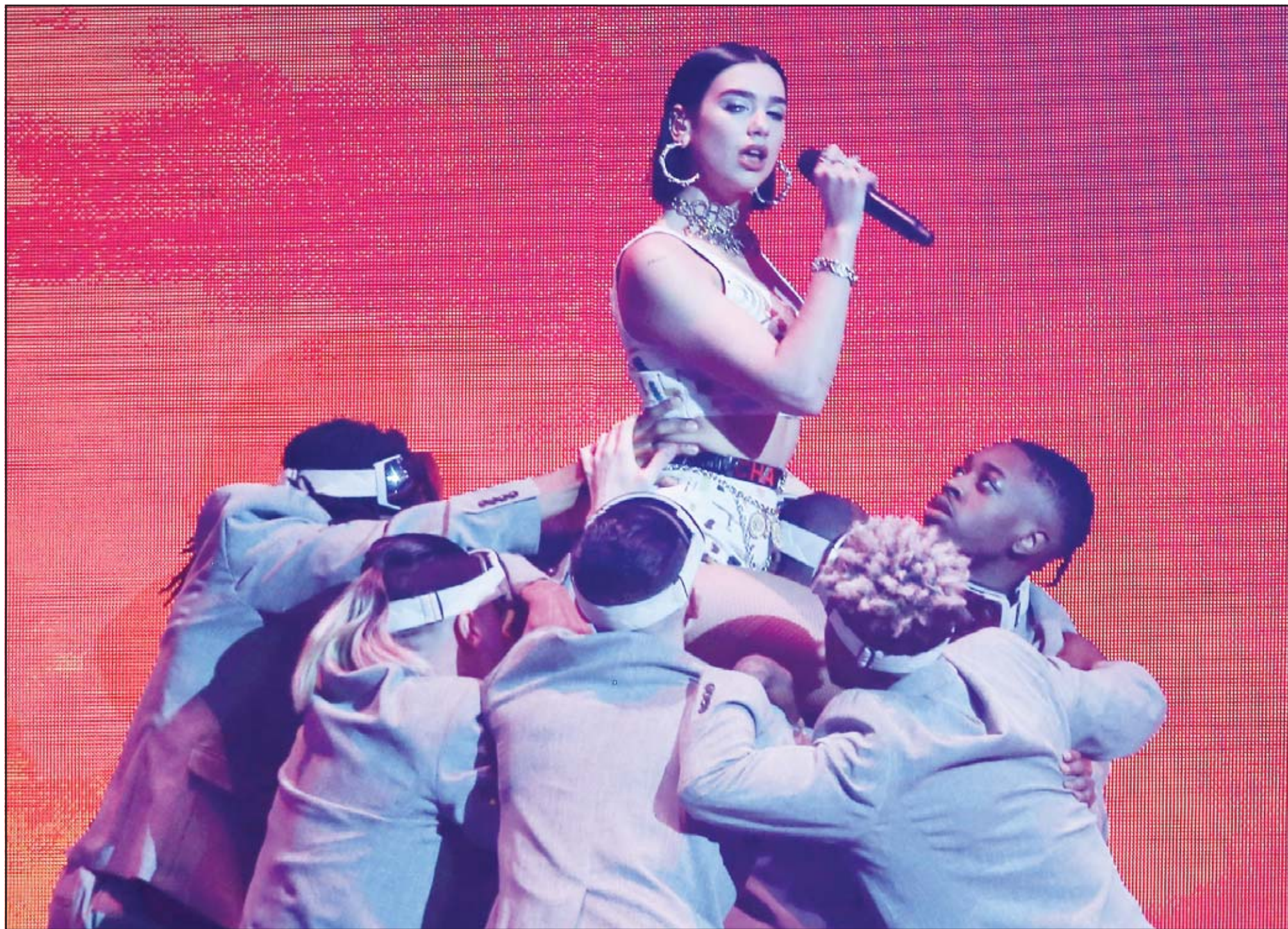
After winning Filipino competition show "Your Face Sounds Familiar Kids", band members Keifer Sanchez, Mackie Empuerto, and Francis Concepcion have continued to solidify their rising-star status with appearances on a number of television series, including CBS' talent search show "World's Best".

Corden, who also hosts "World's Best", invited the singing trio to perform "Dreamgirls" anthem "And I Am Telling You" on the "Late Late Show".

Before taking the stage to belt out a powerful rendition of the ballad, the group gushed about their obsession with Ariana Grande.

"I love Ariana Grande's voice, and I love her attitude," Concepcion said to nods from his fellow band members. Meanwhile, Grande stood backstage watching the interview from a secret television screen, teasing her own on-screen appearance. (Agencies)

Variety



Dua Lipa performs onstage at the Brit Awards in London on Feb 20. (AP)

Awards

Harris named producer of the year

The 1975, Lipa win big at Brit Awards

LONDON, Feb 21, (Agencies): Pop-rockers The 1975, DJ Calvin Harris and singer-songwriter Dua Lipa won major prizes at the UK music industry's Brit Awards on Wednesday during a slick, surprise-free ceremony that set out to celebrate female talent after past allegations of neglect.

Manchester quartet The 1975 was named best British group and also took British album of the year for "A Brief Inquiry into Online Relationships."

Harris was named producer of the year, while his UK chart-topping collaboration with Lipa, "One Kiss", was declared best British single.

Women dominated this year's nominations – outnumbering men for only the second time in the Brits' four-decade history – after past criticism that the Brits have failed to reflect the diversity of British music.

Lipa – who won two Grammy awards earlier this month – and singer-songwriter Anne-Marie started the night with a field-leading four nominations each. Lipa received one award while Anne-Marie went home empty-handed.

Singer Paloma Faith, who slammed the dearth of female performers at last year's Brits ceremony, said she was glad to see a better gender balance represented this time around.

"I know I made quite a lot of people uncomfortable saying that, but now it's been rectified, so I don't care," she said.

This year's show included performances by female acts including Lipa, soulful singer Jorja Smith, Jess Glynne, girl group Little Mix and Pink.

Amid the blossoming of the "Me Too" movement, many attendees wore white roses to the 2018 show to symbolize the fight against sexual harassment, discrimination and assault. The number of women nominated and performing this year was a sign of the UK music industry's desire to change.

But the issue still cast a shadow. The 1975 singer Matty Healy used his best British band acceptance speech to quote music journalist Laura Snapes, who

has written that women who call out male musicians' misogyny are treated as "hysterics who don't understand art."

Snapes made the observation in 2015 and used it again this week after several women accused American singer-songwriter Ryan Adams of sexual misconduct.

Healy's speech was as edgy as things got.

The ceremony opened with a high-voltage performance from "The Greatest Showman" star Hugh Jackman. A silver-spangled Jackman and dozens of dancers performed the title song from the hit movie musical to kick off the awards show at London's O2 Arena.

The studiously inoffensive tone of the speeches was set by singer-songwriter George Ezra, who took the prize for British male solo artist.

Attendance

"There's a load of people I have to thank," he said, then added: "I'm not going to name anybody" in case he forgot someone.

The ceremony's host, comedian Jack Whitehall, poked fun at Ezra's nice-guy image, dubbing him "the Prius of pop" – dull and reliable.

Jorja Smith was named female British artist of the year. The British breakthrough act award went to singer-songwriter Tom Walker, who gave a shout out "to my Gran who's watching somewhere on telly!"

The event was a cozily UK-centric affair, with few of the nominated international acts in attendance. International group winner The Carters – husband-and-wife duo Beyonce and Jay Z – sent a video message recorded in front of a portrait of Meghan, Duchess of Cambridge wearing a crown.

Drake, the international male victor, and international female winner Ariana Grande also sent thanks by video.

Most winners at the Brits are chosen by a ballot of music-industry members. Several are selected by public vote, including video of the year, which Little

Mix won for "Woman Like Me".

Other performers included The 1975 and an ad hoc British supergroup featuring Rag 'n' Bone Man, Dua Lipa, Sam Smith and Calvin Harris.

Pink received the award for outstanding contribution to music.

"It's been an awesome 20 years. Here's to 20 more," said the American singer-songwriter.

Pink closed the show with a performance of several of her best-known songs, including "Just Give Me a Reason" and the protest anthem "What About Us?" – ending with a defiant raised-fist gesture.

The most striking moment may have come during the 1975's acceptance speech from Best British Group, which singer Matty Healy devoted almost entirely to quoting from Guardian writer Laura Snapes' recent article about the sexual misconduct accusations against Ryan Adams: "Male misogynist acts are examined for nuance and defended as traits of 'difficult' artists, women and those who call them out are treated as hysterics who don't understand art."

The show also featured some comedy bits from host Jack Whitehall, who lambasted Shawn Mendes for his recent beefcake Calvin Klein ad at least twice during the performance – true to form, Mendes, appeared embarrassed but unruffled by the ribbing.

The list of 2019 Brit Awards winners:
 ■ Best British Male Solo: George Ezra
 ■ Best British Female Solo: Jorja Smith
 ■ Best British Single: Calvin Harris & Dua Lipa – "One Kiss"

■ Best British Group: The 1975
 ■ Best British Breakthrough: Tom Walker
 ■ Best British Artist Video Of The Year: Little Mix ft. Nicki Minaj – "Woman Like Me"
 ■ Best International Male Solo: Drake
 ■ Best International Group: The Carters
 ■ Best International Female Solo: Ariana Grande

■ Best British Album: The 1975 – "A Brief Inquiry Into Online Relationships"

LOS ANGELES: Focus Features has tapped Kevin Costner and Diane Lane to star as a husband and wife in the suspense thriller "Let Him Go". The two also collaborated on "Man of Steel" and "Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice" as the parents of Superman.

Thomas Bezucha ("The Family Stone") is set to direct his own screenplay, based on Larry Watson's novel of the same name. Paula Mazur and Mitchell Kaplan of the Mazur Kaplan Company will produce alongside Bezucha. Costner will executive produce with Kimi Armstrong Stein, Jeffrey Lampert, and Rod Lake.

Production of "Let Him Go" is expected to start in the spring.

Focus Features and Universal Pictures International will distribute the film worldwide. Josh McLaughlin, Focus Features president of production, will oversee the movie. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: Netflix is in the early stages of developing a Hulk Hogan biopic with Chris Hemsworth attached to star as the wrestling legend and produce.

Netflix has obtained the exclusive life rights and consulting services from Terry Gene Bollea AKA Hulk Hogan. Todd Phillips, whose credits include "War Dogs" and "The Hangover" trilogy, is attached to direct from a script by the writing team of Scott Silver and John Pollono.

Producers are Michael Sugar through his Sugar23's first-look Netflix deal along with Joint Efforts' Phillips and Bradley Cooper, Eric Bischoff, and Hemsworth. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: Jussie Smollett has been arrested and faces criminal charges for allegedly filing a false police report and for disorderly conduct. Chicago police tweeted Thursday morning that the "Empire" actor was under arrest and in custody of detectives.

Smollett claimed that he had been attacked by two men on Jan 29 – he said they beat him, tied a rope around his neck, and doused him with bleach. He also claimed that they shouted racist and homo-

phobic slurs during the assault. However, police now believe that Smollett paid two acquaintances, brothers Olabinjo Osundairo and Abimbola Osundairo, to help him orchestrate the attack. The men have reportedly been cooperating with investigators. (RTRS)

LOS ANGELES: Oscar-winning



Lane



Hemsworth

actress Gwyneth Paltrow on Wednesday counter-sued a retired optometrist who has taken her to court over a 2016 ski slope collision in Utah, saying he caused the crash and was seeking to exploit her fame and fortune three years later.

Paltrow, 46, seeks a symbolic \$1 in damages from Terry Sanderson, 72, who sued her

last month for \$3.1 million in Summit County District Court in Utah over the Feb 26, 2016, incident at Deer Valley Resort in Park City.

"Resolution of this counter claim will demonstrate that Plaintiff (Sanderson) ran into Ms Paltrow and nonetheless blamed her for it in an attempt to exploit her celebrity and wealth," at-

torneys for the actress wrote in the 18-page complaint.

Sanderson announced his lawsuit against Paltrow at a news conference last month in Salt Lake City, saying that he was skiing on a beginner slope when he heard a "hysterical scream" from behind before he was struck between the shoulder blades by the actress. (RTRS)