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How a local musician keeps her dreams and passions alive

WORDS STUART DANKER   PHOTOS JOCELYN WONG LIXIAN



**MUSIC IS A HARD PATH TO PURSUE**, especially when it comes to the local scene. But for Jocelyn Wong Lixian, it's a skill that's always come naturally to her. Another contributing factor would be her upbringing, being exposed to the violin at the age of four and all.

But that doesn't discount the fact that it's still a tough journey to be on. Today, Wong continues pursuing her musical passions and she's never wavered despite the hardships that are rife in the industry. She sits down with Augustman Malaysia shares her ups and downs of life as a local musician and entrepreneur.

**1. Tell us about your background in music and when you decided to pursue this path.**  
It began when I was four years old where I had 12 years of violin and piano lessons, with singing on the side. Then I entered high school and wanted to rock out like Hayley Williams from Paramore. The definite moment of me choosing music as a career path was when I was 13. I learned about Berklee College of Music and decided to be a singer-songwriter then.

**2. Music is not often seen as a stable career path. What made you want to pursue it still?**  
In the beginning, it was purely for the love of music and singing. As a kid, you don't think about financial responsibilities and stability. Fortunately, my parents never ingrained the notion in me that music was an unstable career choice. But I do remember my mum telling me when I was younger and still taking lessons, "If you're not going to be better than others, don't do music, just listen."  
It sounded really harsh at the time, but I am very thankful for it now. In hindsight, she knew this even though her way of communicating was very tiger-mum-like. Another quote I learned along the way was "If you don't do the work, if you don't show up, if you don't practise your instrument, if you don't network and show people that you are performing, then the work is not going to take care of you. So if you take care of the music, the music will take care of you."  
These are the things that have kept me going, are still keeping me going, and are giving me faith in my chosen path.

**3. How's your journey been so far?**  
Great! Not going to lie, there are moments of doubt, turmoil, and frustration. However, there are so many things to learn and achieve and learn again within music itself – there's no end. That shift in perspective has made everything make sense in this crazy ride.

**4. The pandemic was one of the worst times to be a performer. How did you get through that challenging period?**  
I was very lucky to have part-time teaching gigs then. And supportive friends who made sure in the industry who made sure of my well-being and the sustainability of my career. So thankfully my wallet didn't take too much damage. And it actually opened up space for creative writing!

**5. What are the main ways you support yourself today? Have you been thinking about extra methods of earning a living in your craft?**  
My main bread and butter today is music education. Despite loving the art of singing, I found that I love sharing about the art of singing as well. So that is my main source of income – through my new school, Music Nation. I lecture part-time at UCSI as well.  
Side hustles are a combination of performing, writing, recording demos for production houses, and consulting. I'd love to expand into podcasts and developing online educational music content but that's for the future.

**6. What's the difference between life as a teacher and a performer?**  
Personally, there is no difference. Because fundamentally, you are there to present a piece of yourself to your audience – be it to a listener or a music student. It is the setting that is different, that's all. In fact, I firmly believe both roles intertwine and support each other.  
For me personally, I would not have improved in my singing and performance skills without teaching. Teaching is a beautiful art of breaking down the most minute of concepts and doing it a hundred times a week together with your students. How could you not improve? And I refuse to be a teacher who cannot walk the talk.

**7. Through your experience, what do you think are the worst reasons to pursue this path?**  
The worst reason for someone to pursue a music career is because they "like it" and they don't know what else to do, thinking it's an easier life compared to sitting behind a desk.  
Without the hunger, tenacity, and stamina to keep chasing and be better, they won't last. And even if you do have all three, it still might not be the career for you. In my opinion, there really is no best reason to get into music. It's the countless decisions, planning, and acceptances after that that make or break your career.

**8. And on a parting note, do you have advice for aspiring musicians in Malaysia?**  
Just do it! We need more good art and good music in this country, now more than ever. Do it with the right intentions, surround yourself with the right people, and make sure to have a plan and purpose. **AM**

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## SUMMARIES

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