

pulse **people**

Last year, a 7-year-old violinist wowed the crowd with her effortless rendition of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*.



OK, maybe Phoebe Buffay's not exactly the most profound person to be used as an example, and neither were her songs Grammy-worthy, but they sure are catchy, especially the infamous *Smelly Cat*. It's obvious that she sucked at singing, yet that never stopped her from playing at Central Perk, the famous New York coffee outlet in the popular 1990s sitcom, *F.R.I.E.N.D.S.*

There's a YouTube video of all Phoebe's (played by Lisa Kudrow) songs and they never fail to make me laugh and feel



The vocal heart of AAL, the choir team.

Love for music, love for all

A benefit recital aims to help raise funds for selected NGOs and celebrate love and hope through the power of music, writes **Zuliantie Dzul**

good. Music, I've discovered, is a great de-stressor for me.

Musictherapy.org states that music is also used as therapy to address physical, emotional, cognitive, and social needs of individuals. Music therapy also provides avenues for communication that can be helpful to those who find it difficult to express themselves in words.

That's the power of music.

And it's this same power that has driven Hoo Sim Li, a pianist and full-time lecturer in the Institute of Music, UCSI University Kuala Lumpur, to organise All About Love Benefit Recital Series, an annual event

I want people to realise that it's actually not that difficult to do good.

Hoo Sim Li

where everyone can share in the love and joy of music.

Now in its fourth year, the series, conceived and launched by volunteers, also aims to provide fundraising support for selected charities. Tonight's event, to be held at Damansara Performing Arts Centre in Damansara Perdana, is in support of Make-A-Wish Malaysia.

With today also being Earth Day, the theme for this year's concert is "Celebrating Earth Day for a Brighter Future".

"Last time, we didn't have many platforms for music. The opportunity to perform was rare. I can see that the music scene here is slowly coming up," begins Hoo during our meeting near the university in Cheras, Kuala Lumpur.

ENCHANTING EVENING

Classical music is at the core of all the music we hear today, says Hoo, who teaches music history and theory and keyboard skills. "Back when I was studying in the US, there was a radio channel playing classical music. It's in their culture. So I want to introduce this genre here but integrate it with pop songs because I don't want to bore people. An injection of contemporary will

appeal to people better."

Tonight, the audience will be entertained by such classical instrumental pieces like Mozart's *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star*, catchy pop tunes such as Michael Jackson's *Man In The Mirror*, Broadway blockbusters such as *Tomorrow* from the classic *Annie* and original compositions by composer Lim Hoong Bee, Hoo's colleague at UCSI University.

"We also selected a few songs that will reflect the Earth Day theme this year, such as Michael Jackson's *Earth Song* and Woodie Guthrie's *This Land Is Your Land*," says Hoo, adding that Lim was more than happy to expand her repertoire by composing two original songs to reflect the theme and the beneficiary.

In addition to Hoo and Lim, the line-up also includes another of Hoo's colleague, drummer Choong Hueyuen and a six-piece band called MARJ, which was randomly formed for a university course. Singer-songwriter Aina Abdul, who also made a guest appearance in the previous recital, is the lead vocalist.

"Getting the performers wasn't a challenge. Yes, they go by gig, so it can cost a lot. But when I pitched the idea behind this recital, they said 'yes' right away. Getting the



sponsors and venue, now that's the main hurdle. That's why I applied to DPAC and I'm so grateful that they agreed to sponsor this show," shares Hoo, smiling.

LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE

"A man named Reno changed my life," recalls the 29-year-old Hoo of her AAL journey. "He's 76 and he helped my family a lot. Back in 2015, we needed someone to ferry my dad around for his therapies and medical check-ups. My mum was getting exhausted and the taxi cost us a lot. So my brother got a number from a volunteer website and Reno was one of the volunteers. He agreed to help and told us that we could pay him any amount that we could afford. That small kind gesture from a stranger, now a dear family friend, prompted me to help people as well."

And it's with music that Hoo extends a helping hand, with all proceeds going to selected beneficiaries. The last two recitals in 2015 and 2016 saw the proceeds channelled to the National Stroke Association of Malaysia (Nasam) and also the Breast Cancer Welfare Association Malaysia, respectively. This year, AAL has selected Make-A-Wish Malaysia, an organisation which grants the wishes of children with life-threatening illnesses. Since its presence here in 2010, Make-A-Wish Malaysia has granted over 340 wishes to children nationwide.

Last year, AAL raised RM15,600 in support of the Breast Cancer Welfare Association.

Hoo shares: "I've worked closely with

the stroke and breast cancer organisations before. They really have good doctors and therapists. Often, these NGOs lack funding. So this is my way of supporting them. I don't have any target set for this year's benefit. Whatever amount we can make, we'll donate."

It's not easy to keep things going, Hoo admits. The volunteers have to juggle their work in addition to this external project. Sometimes things don't go smoothly but Hoo ensures that there's a back-up plan.

"I've had people asking me whether I can keep doing this every year. So far, it's 'yes'. But I'm open to ideas too; we don't have to do just recitals. We'd be happy to

Aina Abdul performing in the previous concert. She will be singing in tonight's show as well.



ALL ABOUT LOVE BENEFIT RECITAL SERIES

WHEN Tonight at 8pm

WHERE DPAC Theatre, H-01, Empire Damansara, Jalan PJU 8/8, Damansara Perdana, Petaling Jaya, Selangor

TICKETS RM50 and RM30 (DCard members: RM45 and RM27)

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Hoo playing the piano at the previous recital.

consider other hands-on projects and activities," she says.

THE TEAM

Besides Hoo, the team also comprises a choir, the vocal heart of AAL. It brings together individuals (26 members to date) from diverse backgrounds, experiences and interests. "They're not trained singers. They're just a bunch of people who love to sing and at the same time, help others. We have lawyers, accountants, and there's no age limit. You can join as long as you love music and love to sing," says Hoo, smiling.

Meanwhile, this music maestro has been dabbling in music since 4. Just like many Asian children, Hoo was exposed to music early on and attended piano classes.

By the age of 14, she got the opportunity to watch a concert by the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra in KL. She recalls being utterly mesmerised by the pianist's fingerworks and that experience made her want to pursue music. Hoo, who graduated with a Master's from Miami University in Florida, US with flying colours, is eager to share her passion for music in the local music industry.

As the minutes tick and we near the end of our chat, Hoo confides that doing something like this recital helps sharpen her skills and challenge her to raise her standards higher. As for the volunteers, "... it's a platform for them to learn something and help the community," adds Hoo, emphatically.

It's her hope that there'll be a good turnout for tonight's recital. "Come and support AAL and the foundation. You'll be inspired. I want people to realise that it's actually not that difficult to do good," Hoo concludes, a big smile on her pretty face.

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