

Roy Loi Fey Huei (黎沸挥): The Power of Music

by **Kong Kam Yoke**, written on 20th August 2010

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Loi Fey Huei, better known as Li Feihui, wrote the modern classic Mandarin hits Love Is Like a Tide and Waiting For You Till My Heart Aches. One of Singapore's brightest music exports tells us how his love affair with music began with a black and white television concert.

Mention such modern classic Mandarin hits like *Love Is Like a Tide* (《爱如潮水》) and *Waiting For You Till My Heart Aches* (《等你等到我心痛》) to most Chinese in any part of the world and they would likely be familiar with the melodies, if not sing at least part of the song. Both are just some of the catchy, chart-topping compositional works by renowned songwriter Loi Fey Huei (黎沸挥), who was one of Singapore's brightest music exports to Taiwan's music industry in the 1990s.

Born in Brunei in 1965, Loi, the youngest of seven siblings, immigrated to Singapore with his family when he was about 11 years old. He recalls thinking then that his elder brother's guitar playing with his friends at home were "noisy disturbances" when he was busy with his schoolwork. He had never imagined that he would later be so closely associated with music. In the 1970s, when Loi was in lower secondary school, he remembered watching a concert shown on television. It was Rod Steward, bare-backed and barefooted, in a pair of tattered jeans and all drenched in perspiration, singing his signature song, *I Don't Wanna Talk About It*, in front of thousands of people.

Loi reminisced, "I don't know much about music back then. But when I saw all these people in the dark, swaying to the rhythm of the song, some with lighters raised and lighted in the air (this was before neon glow sticks were used at concerts), I remembered wondering how this singer managed to make all these people do whatever he asked them to, and I was amazed by how wildly the audience reacted to his songs."

"It was probably through Rod Steward that I began to realize the power of music, how it connected people. I never quite understood why but this moment left a deep impression and exerted a great impact on me."

The young Loi developed an interest in music but since he did not get too much daily allowance back then, he could not afford to buy any music albums, mainly released on cassette tapes then. Well, at least not the originals.

“There were pirated cassette tapes that cost about \$1.50 each. I would save up for a couple of months and buy one or two tapes of my favourite singers. So at a time when there were no computers, internet or MP3s, these illegal stuff benefitted us poor kids.”

Loi found other means of feeding his hunger for music, “I would go to Bugis Street after school. Back then, it was still a thriving night market that had many roadside stalls selling pirated cassettes. I had no money and didn’t buy anything. I would walk up and down the street the whole night, listening to the songs being played, till the stalls close for the night at about 10 or 11 pm.”

He would later hang out at Katong Shopping Centre, where there used to be quite a number of record shops, for the same reason.

“My family used to stay in the Katong area. I would tell my mom I need to go some place to do my homework. Then I would go to the second level of the shopping centre where one of the record shops was. I had earlier asked for permission to sit outside the electrical shop next door. The shop owner was a kind man who even loan me a stool. I would plonk myself down at the corner right next to the record shop’s loudspeakers. Those were the happiest moments for me. Every day after school, as I do my homework, I would be listening to a non-stop deluge of all kinds of music.”

Even when he got home, his mind would still be filled with different tunes and melodies. When he got more allowance a couple of years later, he finally bought his first gramophone record.

“It was the Air Supply’s *Lost In Love*. When I first heard the record shop play it, I thought it was such incredible music. I even walked over and asked about the record. The shop owner showed me the album cover. But I had no money to buy it. I had to wait till my allowance was raised once again some six months later before I could save enough to get my own copy.”

By then, Loi’s elder brother had bought a gramophone player. He played the record over and over till he could sing the songs by heart. He has kept the record in pristine condition till this day because of its great sentimental value.

It was around this time that his elder brother learnt to play the guitar, often inviting his friends over to practise. Their favourites were rock songs. The younger Loi was influenced by them and therefore exposed to a lot of rock music. They would watch rock concerts on television or rent videotapes of these shows. Loi would fantasize about being a rock star someday.

“I became mesmerized by English songs and rock music. I hardly listen to Mandarin songs. Songs like *The Moon Is Like My Heart* (《月亮代表我的心》) and *Green Island Serenade* (《绿岛小夜曲》) did not show much variety or sophistication compared to English songs. It

was only when singers like Alan Tam (谭咏麟), Fei Yuqing (费玉清), Liu Wen-cheng (刘文正), etc who introduced different sounds to Mandarin songs that I started tuning in to them.”

Loi would stealthily fiddle around on his brother’s guitar when his family was out. He bought song books, usually compilations of the most popular English songs, which had instructions on how to play the guitar and practised till his fingers bled.

He began to provide the accompaniment to his classmates singing, even winning first prize in a singing contest in junior college. After graduation, a few of them would eventually form a singing group, Green Grass Group (青青草小组), when the *xinyao* movement started getting noticed.

One day, one of the group members had tickets for a concert in a school hall. Loi reluctantly tagged along, fearing the concert was the crude, rustic type. It was to mark a major turning point in his life.

“It was The Underground Express (地下铁) performing in one of their first concerts at Jurong Junior College. I found the songs they sang so refreshing and so different from the Alan Tam and Liu Wen-cheng songs popular at that time. There was no elaborate staging or costumes. Just the group playing their guitars and singing songs they penned themselves. I sat glued to my seat, astounded. I noticed that most of the songs were written by someone called Eric Moo. I even asked my classmate who that was and had him pointed out to me.”

“I’m glad I went and am eternally grateful to my friend who had persuaded me to go. If not for this concert, I’ll probably not be working in the music industry at all because till that moment, I had never thought it possible and viable for us to write and sing our own songs.”

Loi would actively participate with his group in *xinyao* activities, singing on radio and at concerts as well as recording their songs for albums. He said, “I was jittery at first when I wrote songs for my group. I was afraid that people would laugh at them. It was strange hearing your friends sing your songs. Later, when the songs were aired on radio, we received positive feedback. People liked our songs!”

When one of the more popular singers of *xinyao*, Jiang Hu (姜郢), had the opportunity to cut his own album, he asked Loi to write him a fast number. Loi recalled, “I had doubts – how do you write a fast song? But Jiang Hu told me to just give it a go. So I did.”

The song *Not That I’m Unwilling* (《不是不愿意》) was Loi’s first song written for a commercially released album. It would eventually stay on the top of the charts for 12 weeks.

“It really boosted my confidence in songwriting. It was something I had never before imagined possible – write our own songs! And people actually liked my song! I was thrilled and felt like writing 20 or 30 songs at that very moment. From then on, I wrote many songs.”

He was by then firm friends with Eric Moo, forming an informal group called “City That Never Sleeps” (不夜城) with Heng Cheng Hwa (邢增华) and Tan Kah Beng (陈佳明). They holed up in a rented flat, living on Moo’s earnings as a performer, and exchanged ideas and studied songwriting techniques. Moo’s albums then would contain many songs with music composed by him and Loi and lyrics written by Heng and Tan. Moo’s success was encouraging to the group.

They would dream about writing songs someday for famous singers like Alan Tam. It seemed highly unlikely then but years later, they would realize this dream. Loi’s songs, for example, were sung by many popular artistes of the region like Andy Lau (刘德华), Jeff Chang (张信哲), Jacky Cheung (张学友), Tanya Chua (蔡健雅), A-Do (阿杜), etc.

Loi was then working as a police officer. He soon resigned to focus on his songwriting. It was a risk then as there was as yet no music industry to speak of in Singapore. But Loi was determined to give it a go with his parents’ support.

“I was the first full-time professional songwriter in Singapore. It didn’t seem viable back then but I believed we should strive for our dreams. Only then would our lives be meaningful. If Singapore does not have its own music industry, why don’t we create one, instead of waiting around for things to happen.”

But things were not smooth going in the beginning. There were days when Loi would make a one hour bus journey home for meals to save money. Loi persevered, hoping that things would turn around eventually. It did.

Within the year, in 1986, Moo was signed on by Liu Wen-cheng’s company. Loi would go with Moo to Taiwan for his recording sessions, where he learnt a lot in the studio. He would also receive many invitations to write songs for overseas artistes.

In 1987, Loi was approached by a local record company. They had noticed Loi from all the songs he wrote for Moo. Loi would eventually release five albums as a singer.

“I was glad I had the opportunity to stand onstage as a performer. Later, when I wrote different songs for other singers, I could imagine how they would look and sound onstage which helped me craft my songs.”

In 1993, a Taiwanese record company signed him on. For the next eight years, he stayed in Taiwan to develop his singing and later, producing, career, releasing three albums in the first five years.

“My Taiwan stint changed my outlook on life completely. I learnt so much in those eight years, things I would otherwise never get a chance to experience in Singapore. It helped me understand the Taiwan entertainment and music scene. I understand that to be successful, one had to have the right attitude and discipline. You may lack the singing and dancing skills but you can train for these. But without the right attitude and discipline, you had no chance.”

“Also, to make it in the Taiwan entertainment scene, one had to be able to express oneself well. When you talk, you are expressing your personality and feelings. If you can’t talk well, then you won’t be able to show your personality and your thoughts. How can a singer without personality make it at all? That’s why there are so many talk shows in Taiwan. If you have poor conversational skills, then you may not get any camera shots on the programme. It would mean a wasted trip. So you must make sense and show substance.”

Today, aside from appearing on television as a judge for talent shows, Loi would apply his experience and lessons learnt overseas in the training courses at his music school in Singapore, which he started in 2006. Aside from singing, keyboard and guitar classes, he would also conduct artiste development programmes where students undergo months or even years of training in creativity, stage awareness and studio technique.

He feels young aspiring musicians should just create the music they believed in and maybe one day, they would become the next trendsetter.

“If you say you love music, then you must be responsible and sincere to music. Be an original musician, and not a copycat. Listen to more songs, all kinds of songs, be they good or bad. Then come up with something new. You can’t expect to hide in a room and be creative.”

Loi would always get his students to attend *xinyao* concerts as he believes knowing one’s roots is also crucial training for a Singapore musician.

“It’s like children must know their parents’ birthdays. As aspiring musicians, one must know how Singapore music began. Many of us from the *xinyao* movement had little training or technique. We sang from our true feelings and passion. This sincerity made us unique. I hope the young can experience these qualities and use them to create their very own music miracle.”

Quote

“Music has kept me company all this time. It’s like family to me. It’s there when I’m happy, when I’m sad and when I’m lost. Just like my family, music has never let me down. It has added much colour to my life. When I don’t feel like talking, music has kept me company, like a shadow. I’m fortunate to have this shadow.”

Awards

2000: 7th Y.E.S. 93.3 FM Hit Awards, Singapore, *Best Lyricist* for 《心如刀割》

2004: 9th Composers and Authors Society of Singapore (COMPASS) Annual Awards,
Top Local Chinese Pop Song for 《练习》

Discography

1985: 《我的心情是一个什么样的故事》（*Xinyao* compilation）

1988: 《请在我心经过》

1989: 《改变》

1990: 《只有你能完成我的歌》

1992: 《说走就走》

1993: 《等你等到我心痛》

1994: 《说走就走》（released in Taiwan）

1995: 《想着你的人》（released in Taiwan）

1996: 《乱飞》（released in Taiwan）

1996: 《定做一个天堂》（compilation released by BMG）

Major Works

Year of Release	Song Title	Artiste	Title of Album/Project	Lyricist	Composer
1985	不是不愿意	姜郢			黎沸挥
1986	太阳眼镜	巫启贤	何必孤独	陈佳明	黎沸挥
1986	再一次恋爱	巫启贤	个性生活写真集 2 - 何必孤独	邢增华	黎沸挥
1987	啤酒周围的故事	巫启贤	我想说的是 - 唱不完的爱情	陈佳明	黎沸挥
1987	我的眼泪是真的	伊能静	有我有你	邢增华	黎沸挥
1987	相爱就是这种感觉	巫启贤	我想说的是 - 唱不完的爱情	陈佳明	黎沸挥
1988	关于爱情	伍思凯+马玉芬	爱情的脸	陈佳明	黎沸挥
1988	让全世界起舞	黎沸挥	只有你能完成我的歌	陈佳明	黎沸挥
1993	想你的爱	何润东	想你的爱	徐世珍	黎沸挥
1993	爱如潮水	张信哲	心事	李宗盛	黎沸挥
1993	伤心的情人	梁朝伟	为情所困	黎沸挥	黎沸挥
1995	等你等到我心痛	张学友	等你等到我心痛	小雪	黎沸挥
1995	说走就走	黎沸挥	说走就走	黎沸挥	黎沸挥
1995	影子情人	林忆莲	Love Sandy	邢增华	黎沸挥
1995	心图	彭佳慧	说真心话	黎沸挥	黎沸挥
1996	心灰	叶倩文	真心	王裕宗	黎沸挥
1999	我想喝一杯	彭羚	好好爱	周耀辉	黎沸挥
1999	风一样的男子	陈晓东	风一样的男子	严云农+丁晓雯	黎沸挥
1999	心如刀割	张学友	走过 1999	黎沸挥	黎沸挥
2001	<i>Ready For Love</i>	张柏芝	爱的练习语	黎沸挥	黎沸挥
2001	<i>Why</i>	蔡健雅	I Do Believe	小寒	黎沸挥
2002	隐形	周蕙	寂寞城市	王裕宗	黎沸挥

2002	在晴朗的一天出发	梁静茹	闪亮的星	李焯雄	黎沸挥
2002	无法阻挡	阿杜	天黑	王裕宗+ 林秋离	黎沸挥
2002	练习	刘德华	美丽的一天	李安修+ 王裕宗	黎沸挥
2006	下雪	阿杜	i...do	林秋离+ 林宇中+ 许环良	黎沸挥
2009	冲动	萧亚轩	三面夏娃	葛大为+ 黎沸挥	黎沸挥

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