



Pursuing their dreams, flying the flag high

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong highlighted, in his National Day Rally address, several Singaporeans who followed their passion and broke new ground. **Seow Bei Yi, Derek Wong and Tee Zhuo** report.

Conductor and composer Wong Kah Chun with children from Project Infitude, an initiative he co-founded to bring music to underprivileged children and those with special needs. PHOTO: CHILD AT STREET 11



Helping kids discover music like he did

Had conductor and composer Wong Kah Chun taken the path of his schoolmates, after graduating from Raffles Junior College more than a decade ago, he may have specialised in physics.

But Mr Wong, now 32, took a full scholarship from the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music at National University of Singapore, and studied music composition.

His parents supported him even though there were no musicians in his family. "They saw my interest in music and there was never once when they said I should focus on my studies and stop practising the trumpet or anything," he said.

The eldest son of a Singapore Armed Forces warrant officer and a childcare teacher, he was in Primary 1 when he was asked to join

the school's brass band. School bands had been introduced in 1965, and gave kids from less well-off homes a chance to pick up music.

More than two decades later, Mr Wong has become chief conductor of the Nuremberg Symphony Orchestra in Germany, which Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong described as a "most prestigious appointment".

He flies back to Singapore every two months or so to bring music to underprivileged children, as well as those with special needs, as part of

Project Infitude – an initiative he co-founded.

Said PM Lee: "He is giving back to society, so that others can discover music just like he did."

"When Kah Chun comes home to his HDB flat in Jurong West that he grew up in – second floor, still no air-con, he gets sweaty at night. He says it is still 'the best because it is home, better than any hotel'."

bysseow@sph.com.sg
wderek@sph.com.sg
teezhuo@sph.com.sg



For Mr Khairul Rusydi, co-founder of Reactor, home is a place where people can help one another and form a community. PHOTO: FACEBOOK/MENDAKI CLUB

Paying it forward through mentoring

Mr Khairul Rusydi is co-founder of Reactor, which mentors youth and conducts courses on entrepreneurship.

The 29-year-old received the Anugerah Mendaki award in 2014.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said in his speech that he met Mr Rusydi at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London in April, when the latter represented Singapore at the Commonwealth Youth Council. He said: "Having succeeded with the help of

the community, Rusydi is now paying it forward by mentoring others."

Asked why it is important for people to help one another in their community, Mr Rusydi said: "The narrative we've had for the nation so far will change, and the narrative for us in the future would be to have a Singapore diaspora in which our young people will work around the region."

"It's important for us to decide where we want to call home, and home is where people can help one another and form a community."



Kwan Guan Huat Joo Chiat Popiah owner Michael Ker took a pay cut in taking over the family business. PHOTO: MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION

Keeping alive family's popiah tradition

Mr Michael Ker, a pharmacist for 12 years, quit his job eight years ago and took charge of his family's popiah and kueh pie tee business.

It meant an almost 50 per cent pay cut, but he was not deterred.

Mr Ker, 42, said: "I decided to carry on our family tradition of making popiah because it goes back three generations. It would have been a pity if I didn't do it and the heritage of this food vanished."

He wakes up before sunrise to prepare popiah skins from scratch

– like his father and uncle used to do, he said yesterday. And he is glad the Government is taking steps to preserve Singapore's food culture.

"From an air-conditioned office, I moved to a hot, sweaty environment with long hours," he said. "It's tiring, it's hard work, but it's something I feel is precious," he added.

When asked about his proudest moments since making the switch, Mr Ker said it was when he and his team took the humble popiah to New York, Copenhagen and Dubai.



Lee Yong Kuang and Sabrina Tan: Scheme allows newly-wed couple to buy their first home

In July last year, army officer Lee Yong Kuang and fund accountant Sabrina Tan tied the knot and moved into a new four-room flat in Punggol.

It cost \$345,000 after Housing Board grants, a sum that the couple is paying, using their Central Provident Fund savings.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong yesterday highlighted the couple as an example to underscore Singapore's "uniquely successful" housing policies. "We are the only major city in the world where nearly every young couple getting married can afford to buy their first home immediately," he said.

Added Mr Lee Yong Kuang: "We are very glad such an arrangement is possible and it definitely helps to alleviate our financial burden."



Sim Chi Yin: First Asian commissioned as Nobel Peace Prize photographer

Documentary photographer Sim Chi Yin's work has covered Chinese miners affected by silicosis, a lung disease, and the lives of Indonesian women migrant workers. The 39-year-old won the seventh annual Getty Images and Chris Hondros Fund Award this year. Last year, she became the first Asian to be commissioned as the Nobel Peace Prize photographer, travelling to places such as North Korea to pursue her projects, noted PM Lee.

The former ST correspondent has said in a previous interview that her work is "super slow-burn, iconic and far from the frontlines".



Mark Ong: Sneaker artist finds success in an art close to his heart

Artist Mark Ong took his first steps in the sneaker industry when he won an online competition in 2003 and received an order for 72 pairs of sneakers overnight. He sold each pair for US\$300 (S\$411), and his earlier works now sell for thousands of dollars.

Today, he designs customised shoes for celebrities and footwear companies under the brand SBTG (pronounced "sabotage").

Said PM Lee: "To Mark, this is a dream come true, as he has loved drawing since he was a child, inspired by the art and creativity of his parents."

In July, Ong designed jersey numbers for English football club Arsenal when it was here for the International Champions Cup.



Azhar Ali: Happy to find his calling in life-saving cancer research

Dr Azhar Ali, a senior research scientist at the Cancer Science Institute of Singapore (CSI), was highlighted by PM Lee for leading a team of researchers in conducting potentially life-saving research.

In June, ST reported that scientists from the CSI and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Centre in the United States may have found a way to deal with lung cancer cells resistant to treatment.

Dr Azhar said then: "If the information I've gotten from my studies can be used by someone else, to be applied in a clinic and benefit patients, I think I'll be very happy."



Darius Cheung and Roshni Mahtani: One couple, two entrepreneurs

Mr Darius Cheung's entrepreneurial ways started from his secondary school days when he sold video CDs from Hong Kong not available here to classmates. The 37-year-old later co-founded 99.co, a search platform for property that connects agents, buyers and sellers, in Singapore and Indonesia.

His wife Roshni Mahtani is also a digital entrepreneur, having founded media start-up Tickled Media, which operates parenting site theAsianparent.com.