

## INTERVIEW THE EXPERTS

# Q&A

By Gerald Chuah

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**P**ROFESSIONAL violinist and lecturer Dr Joanne Yeoh Pei Sze has made the country proud. Not only has she performed internationally and won awards, Yeoh now also shares her passion and imparts her music knowledge to students as Head of Music Department at Universiti Putra Malaysia.

Having started playing piano at age four and the violin at eight, Yeoh believes that being gifted in music is a bonus, but learning the right technique and having a solid foundation is crucial to determine the quality of a musician.

Looking back, Yeoh said: "It is always better to be formally trained in music."

She pursued music education in the United Kingdom after leaving school, and obtained a First-Class Honours Degree from the University of Middlesex in 1998.

Her hard work and dedication paid off, and opened doors for her to further her studies and pursue her music career.

Although classically trained, she also plays in contemporary settings like pop, dance and rap, which developed her musical prowess.

Since her return to Malaysia in 2000, Yeoh was thrust into the international limelight when she performed in numerous concerts alongside Chinese superstars around the world including Jacky Cheung, David Tao, and Alan Tam.

### AWARDS

Yeoh has won many awards over the years, including The Outstanding Young Malaysian Award under the category of Personal Improvement and Accomplishment 2004, and Martell's Rising Personality Award 2008.

In Malaysia, she won UPM's Vice Chancellor Fellowship Award 2011 under the category of Arts and Creativity, UPM Excellent Service Award 2012, and the National Academic Award 2012 under the category of Arts and Creativity, which she received in August.

Her accomplishments have also been included in *Marquis Who's Who in the World* 2012 & 2013 editions, and in *Malaysia Book of Records* 2012.

Now Yeoh's musical talent is much sought after by international corporations like Sony, Panasonic, Omega, Tag Heuer, Microsoft, Audi, BMW, Ferrari, Volkswagen, and Mercedes.



### SECOND ALBUM

In August 2005, Yeoh released her solo instrumental debut album *Pulse of the Metropolis*. Now eight years later, she has launched her second album *After a Dream* this month.

The album contains 10 songs, eight of which are in the public domain. The instrumental album contains World, Ethnic, Classical, Jazz and R&B elements.

Yeoh said: "There is no specific reason why it took me so long to come up with another album."

"Timing is everything, and NOW feels right," adding there is a certain sense of personality and maturity in her new album.

In this Q&A, Yeoh talks about different aspects of her music career, and what's been keeping her busy lately.

**Q:** Talk about your passion in music. How did you discover your musical talent and what made you pursue it to the highest level?

My mother discovered my musical talent and sent me for piano classes when I was four. She realised I had a keen ear, and was able to pick up lessons learnt very quickly and spontaneously.

Being gifted in music is a bonus, but passion and perseverance may get you there too. Four years later, I enrolled in violin classes as this was an instrument that intrigued me tremendously.

I would watch violinists on TV sawing away as an orchestra group, making such beautiful sounds collectively, and there was no turning back.

I studied both instruments and completed my Diplomas while still a

teenager.

My highest qualification in music is PhD in music psychology. The focus of my study was on music and consumer behaviour. I intend to conduct further research in this area, as it interests me immensely.

**Q:** What is your current role and responsibility as Head of the Music Department at UPM, and why do you recommend your music school?

The UPM Music Department was set up in 1994. As head of the department, my job is to direct and chart our growth. Doing research and publishing papers are also part of my job description.

I believe we are one of the strongest music departments in a public institution.

We offer a four-year B.Mus programme. Our course modules and syllabuses are substantial, and are geared towards Western Classical and Jazz music.

Our Masters and PhD syllabuses are comprehensive and includes a wide range of topics from musicology and education, to performance and therapy.

The learning environment here is very conducive as students and staff enjoy very good teaching and learning relationships.

Our staff are also highly qualified in their respective fields, and are well-respected in music circles both nationally and internationally. We are proud to say that we have had 99% rate of students enrolling and graduating from our music course. If there are any dropouts, it is due to a mismatch.

**Q:** What can listeners expect from your second album 'After a Dream'?

The new album was conceived late last year. It took me almost a year to complete.

This instrumental album has stylistic elements containing World, Ethnic, Classical, Jazz and R&B elements. Some of the traditional favourites are Miserlou (Greek), Dixie's Land (American), Greensleeves (English), Khosn Kale Mazel Tov-Hava Nagila (Jewish), and Danny Boy (Irish).

From my experience, people tend to remember beautiful melody lines after a performance, rather than fast brilliant ones.

There is nothing more tangible than an exquisite melody that lingers in the senses, and that is one of the reasons I chose to cover these songs, because of their beautiful melodies.

The album was put together by a small team including Daniel Veerapen as producer and arranger, Ken Lau as sound engineer, and Sammy Liew as artistic designer.

I am in the midst of negotiating with distributors to market the album in music stores, and will be making it available on a digital platform as well.

For details about the new album, visit [www.joanneyeoh.com.my](http://www.joanneyeoh.com.my).