

Meet the seniors who work well into their seventies and eighties, and are loving every minute of it.

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**W**HO says that senior citizens should hang up their boots after retirement? Although the Government has set the retirement age at 60, many seniors have proven that age is just a number as they continue to play an active role in the workforce. In fact, some even work well into their seventies as they find great fulfilment in what they do.

Take, for instance, pianist Ooi Eow Jin, 75. Ooi is an all too familiar figure at the plush Colonial Cafe in Majestic Hotel, Kuala Lumpur. From Tuesday to Sunday, 3pm to 6pm, Ooi tickles the ivories to entertain guests at the cafe as they indulge in some of the finest teas and scones.

Ooi's selection ranges from traditional jazz to bossa nova, golden oldies, current hit songs and classic Malay numbers.

As much as he enjoys entertaining guests, Ooi says the job also provides him with an opportunity to keep his music career afloat with the resurgence in interest in songs from yesteryear.

"Besides older audiences, there is a growing number of youngsters who enjoy songs from the past, especially from the 1960s to 1980s. There's nothing more satisfying than entertaining people who gravitate towards music," said Ooi, who has been a pianist with the hotel since December 2012.

During his daily sets, Ooi plays 55 pieces – all from memory – without flipping through music scores. With his penchant for jazz music, Ooi tries to improvise his pieces; this also helps to improve his memory and cognitive skills.

During the interview, the friendly sep-

# There's reward in work



Ooi striking a pose with legendary director/actor P. Ramlee during the good old days in the early 1960s.

tuagenarian personally dedicated several songs to the writer, including her favourites such as *Lagehda* (Sheila Majid), *Unforgettable* (Nat King Cole) and *New York, New York* (Frank Sinatra). As his fingers glided across the ebony and ivory keys, Ooi remarked: "I enjoy playing these songs. Besides cheering up music lovers, these pieces evoke nostalgic memories, too."

The Penang-born Ooi enjoys a long association – as part-time pianist – with numerous upscale hotels such as the E&O in Penang,





**Talented:** Pianist Ooi Eow Jin, 75, continues to mesmerise guests at the Colonial Cafe in Majestic Hotel, Kuala Lumpur.

Carcosa Seri Negara and Ritz-Carlton, Kuala Lumpur. Ooi made his mark on the entertainment scene in the 1960s when he played for the RTM Orchestra, led by Alfonso Soliano.

"Alfonso had noticed my piano skills when I was moonlighting at E&O Hotel in 1960, and invited me to join the orchestra in KL. I traded my full time job as a government clerk for the position of pianist in the orchestra. Some thought I was crazy, but it was something I had to do due to my passion for music," said Ooi, a trained pianist who also plays the organ, accordion and vibraphone.

During his stint at RTM, Ooi served as bandleader, conducted concerts and went on tours with home-grown artistes. He has fond memories of his tour of Sabah with legendary actor Tan Sri P. Ramlee back in 1965.

"We travelled across Sabah in helicopters and performed for the soldiers. P. Ramlee was such a jovial and friendly guy, he made the trip a memorable one," Ooi recalled, with a twinkle in his eye.

In the 1970s, Ooi made a name for himself as one of the country's most sought-after composers, having written music for the likes of Sudirman Arshad, Salamiah Hassan and Dahlan Zainuddin.

"For the Bintang RTM competition in 1973, I arranged a Broadway medley comprising *Cabaret* (Liza Minnelli) and *Big Spender* (Shirley Bassey) for Sudirman and he won the competition," said Ooi, who went on to work as a music officer at ITM Shah Alam before

retiring as a music supervisor at TV3 in 1999.

After retirement, he continued as a music lecturer at International College of Music, National Arts, Culture and Heritage Academy, and Universiti Putra Malaysia where he was appointed adjunct professor.

These days, the father-of-two is contented to tickle the ivories and continues to entertain guests at lounges. Sometimes, fans of RTM Orchestra swing by the hotel to listen to Ooi's selection of music pieces.

"It brings back good memories when old friends come around to visit. It gives me a sense of appreciation that people enjoy listening to my music," he said.

### Still going strong

At 82, Roberto Herrera cuts an inspiring figure as an administrator at his brother's real estate agency in Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur.

"It is important to sharpen your mind and polish your social skills. Work has enabled me to stay mentally alert. Besides broadening my knowledge of the real estate industry, I get to surf the Internet, conduct meetings with clients, and get involved in the day-to-day operations," said Herrera, who has been helping out in the family business for over 30 years. Prior to retiring as a public relations officer at the German embassy in 1992, Herrera was a part-time negotiator, having joined his broth-

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# Keeping current and occupied



'I love my job,' says Roberto Herrera, 81, who manages his brother's real estate firm in Kuala Lumpur.

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er's firm in 1983.

His current job gives him an opportunity to learn how to manage a real estate business as he keeps tabs on negotiators, company accounts, auction dates and payment of bills.

"Initially it seemed challenging having to learn how to write offers, safeguard deposits and gather documentation for solicitors. Luckily, my brother showed me the ropes. Over the years, I truly enjoyed my job as it enables me to stay mentally alert and active while providing me with a chance to communicate with clients from all walks of life," said the father of five.

While he takes his job seriously, he considers it an enjoyable hobby. He rises at 5am daily and drives to work at 6.30am to avoid the morning rush hour. Once at work, he flips through the morning papers and reads the Bible before starting work.

"I love my job as it keeps me occupied. I get to keep abreast of the latest developments in the real estate industry, and still have time to meet up with friends for lunch and tea. Plus, it's nice to have an income stream," said Herrera who stays fit by exercising, reading and getting involved in church activities.