

## The paper's people

# Strumming through life

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MUSIC was always kind of on the back burner for Kelly Teh, until she "met" the ukulele.

"Now it is an essential part of my life," says the music teacher from Kuala Lumpur, who can also flex her musical prowess in a gamelan ensemble, and on the harmonica.

"I picked up playing the ukulele during a music conference in Perth, Australia, in 2012," she relates, explaining how she chanced upon a group of people playing the little stringed instrument under a big gum tree, and she was smitten!

"When I got home to Malaysia, my first teacher was the Internet. I picked up the basics from videos and other online resources," she shares, adding that she had the good fortune of meeting and having three lessons under the tutelage of a young Hawaiian instructor, Brandon Tucay, in 2012. Sadly, however, her teacher passed away suddenly. His untimely death spurred Teh to keep going. Inspired by Tucay's passion for the instrument, Teh decided to set up the Ukulele Association here in Malaysia in July 2013.

Since then, it has been an ongoing journey of teaching and learning for the bubbly lady, who is married to a photographer.

Although she was trained in Japanese traditional dance as a young girl, Teh's career path didn't always revolve around the arts and music. After secondary school, she explored Secretarial Studies at Stamford College in Petaling Jaya and obtained her LCCI Private Secretary's Diploma.

Teh's father had passed away when she was only 12.

"I never had the chance to go to university then because it was too expensive for my mum, who had to bring up three

girls on her own," she explains, saying how her late mother, a dress maker, was such a dedicated and compassionate parent.

"I am a twin and the youngest among my sisters. Strangely, both of my sisters are also musicians – the elder is a pianist while my twin sister is a violinist," Teh shares, revealing that it was only much much later in life (20 years to be precise) that she decided to make a more concerted move towards pursuing music more seriously – Teh decided to go back to school and get a diploma in Music, majoring in Classical Piano at the Akademi Seni Budaya Dan Warisan Kebangsaan (Aswara), which she completed in 2010.

"Two years later, I was able to begin my degree in Arts and Cultural Management. This is my final year and I am looking forward to wearing my mortarboard at age 54. It will be a dream come true!"

When she's not busy with college work, Teh teaches the ukulele these days.

"The ukulele is an easy instrument to pick up and has a therapeutic effect on its players," she says, adding that on social media, it is frequently called the instrument of "peace".

"Usually I have 10 classes for beginners. The youngest of my students is five, and I have senior citizens as well!" explains Teh, who has classes all year round.

The classes are conducted at various venues in the Klang Valley, including at the Sentul Library, Universiti Putra Malaysia, the YMCA and Fairview International School.

As founder of the Malaysia Association of Love for Ukulele Music, she has organised exchange and homestay programmes between children from Malaysia and those from Taiwan, South Korea and Japan.

What is Teh's life philosophy? "Never quit learning!" she offers.



Ukulele teacher Teh says that learning keeps one youthful.  
— LH TANG