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Headline: Inspired by a note to stop singing



Hubert Ng's song, Ni Ni, inspired by the interactions between a couple and their daughter, topped a Taiwanese music-streaming service's chart for more than a month last year. PHOTO: TRACY CHIN

Inspired by a note to stop singing

Told he was singing badly, singer-songwriter Hubert Ng persevered with vocal lessons and music gigs, and got his lucky break in Taiwan with the hit, Ni Ni

Cara Wong

Local singer-songwriter Hubert Ng, who is not married and has no children, was so inspired by the interactions between a married couple and their daughter that he composed a song for them.

"At that time, I was missing my family too," says Ng, who was in Taiwan last year for a school exchange programme.

He then approached the duo, Taiwanese Internet music stars The Couple, with a demo of the song, for which the husband subsequently wrote the lyrics.

Titled Ni Ni, after the couple's daughter, the song topped Taiwan-originated music-streaming service KKBOX's chart for more than a month last year, overtaking hits by Mandopop stars such as Jay Chou and Hebe Tien.

It is not the first time the 24-year-old has beaten the big stars on the charts.

Two years ago, his eponymous EP also dominated the iTunes album sales charts for a day, overshadowing albums by popular K-pop boy

bands CNBlue and Super Junior.

The undergraduate has come a long way from a brutal start to his career.

An anonymous audience member once wrote a note to Ng, then 16, telling him to stop singing during an open-mic session at a cafe.

The note, given to him by a waiter during his rendition of Eternal Flame, by American band The Bangles, is still with him today.

Recalling the reality check he received eight years ago, Ng tells The Straits Times: "I've really loved singing all along, but nobody told me I was tone-deaf. I was really affected and was quite depressed for a while."

Instead of giving up, however, he took vocal lessons.

"For practice, I even used to listen to notes while on the bus to train my pitching. It was a very long and tough process," says Ng, who also learnt to play the keyboard and guitar.

Since then, he has been active in the music scene here, getting music gigs in bars, and uploading videos of his music performances onto platforms such as YouTube and

Facebook. When he was 21, he began songwriting "to keep a diary of what was happening in my life".

He first got his foot in the door of Taiwan's music industry last year, when he was there on a semester-long exchange programme from Singapore Management University, where he is studying for a bachelor's degree in business.

He then extended his stay in the territory to pursue a music career after a successful open-call performance on a Facebook live-streaming event opened the door to more opportunities.

The company behind the event introduced him to The Couple, which comprises married couple Kim and Nico.

The success of Ni Ni led producers of popular Taiwanese variety shows, such as 100% Entertainment, to book him for appearances.

Now back in Singapore to complete his final year of studies, he intends to return to Taiwan after graduation to pursue a music career.

"I guess my marketing major can help me when it comes to presenting my work," says Ng, who is currently producing more songs for

The Couple.

Looking back at that disastrous open-mic session all those years ago, he says he has the anonymous stranger to thank for where he is now.

"I've always told my friends that I would really want to thank him for that message because it spurred me to do things that I don't think I could or would be doing now."

"If I were to be in my comfort zone all the time, I probably wouldn't have started songwriting."

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