

Helping young artistes get started

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TO HELP Singapore's budding music artistes start their careers, music company Parka provides production and marketing services at no upfront cost, taking only a cut of any profits the artistes may earn.

University student Dominic Yuan was inspired to create Parka after struggling to break into the industry as a teenage musician. From 2014 to 2017, Yuan played in bands and created original music – but this did not lead to an eventual music career.

He felt this was because he lacked a “structure” to support him in areas such as production, recording and marketing. Young artistes who are just starting out are unlikely to be able to afford such services, he noted.

This led to him founding Parka, with the aim of giving artistes a hand with the infrastructure that has been developed, and allowing them to focus on their music and artistry.

He later pitched the social enterprise to Singapore Management University, where he is studying, and received a capital grant from the university's startup incubator programme, covering its first four months or so. Since January 2022, Parka has served as a record label and marketing company to clients as young as 19.

Of the music industry's four main revenue streams – royalties, brand deals, shows and merchandise – Parka's artistes earn income only from streaming royalties on platforms such as Spotify, which “does not pay a lot”.



Parka gave its artiste Nicole Ann Chan (centre) the opportunity to perform her music at a local music festival in December 2022, alongside musicians Dominic Yuan on keyboard, Shaun Goh on bass, and Jonathan Ang on guitar. PHOTO: PARKA

The usual market rate for producing a song is around S\$1,500, Yuan estimates. If a song gains 100,000 streams – a big feat for anything released by a small label – this would yield only about S\$400 in royalties.

Labels can engage distributors to get their songs onto official Spotify playlists, thus gaining more listeners, but the distributors then pocket around 20 per cent of streaming royalties earned.

To help fund Parka's operations, Yuan produces music for other artistes, charging them close to market rates. He also received a sum of S\$3,500 from an entrepreneur internship programme this year, and intends to apply for government grants in the future.

The Parka team comprises polytechnic and university students who work part-time. Said Yuan: “The pay is not great and there are a

lot of sacrifices that they make, but they want to help artists be heard.”

This is in contrast to most Singaporeans who do not see music as a viable career, he added; he has received raised eyebrows and curious looks when mentioning Parka to others. “It almost feels like discrimination sometimes,” he said.

“(People in Singapore think they) need to grow up, get a job, buy a house and car, get married and have kids, but maybe there is a bit more to life than just that.”

Parka aims to build a roster of artistes who both create music and understand the industry, said Yuan.

“I hope that whatever we are doing now will lead to the day where the next generation can do music and the rest of Singapore can also not only accept it but support it, just like they do for a lot of other industries,” he said.