

Blind Malaysian veteran singer uses karaoke app to promote his songs and earn a living

Veteran singer Alfred Ho, 72, who is blind, used to eke a living as a busker at the KLCC LRT station concourse in Kuala Lumpur, earning between RM100 and RM250 each week.

Then the pandemic struck, causing Ho to lose his primary source of income due to health and safety protocols.

“My income has dropped to zero since March 2020. When I used to busk, people would buy my CDs after hearing my live performances.

“But nowadays, it’s difficult to promote my CDs as I don’t have an avenue to promote my songs,” said Ho in an interview in Kuala Lumpur recently.

Instead of sitting idle at his apartment in Kuchai Lama, the musician has made good use of the various movement control orders to learn to introduce his songs on a social karaoke app called WeSing.

With the help of his wife, part-time paediatric nurse Rufina Baptist, 62, the couple has recorded over 900 songs and uploaded them on the app.

Ho also plans to release a few compilation CDs to earn some income.

“The pandemic hit us hard and it’s tough to make ends meet.

Baptist (left) using a smartphone to record her husband Ho’s songs before uploading them online. Ho also plans to release a few compilation CDs soon.

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“Thankfully, I am receiving some financial help from Yayasan Kebajikan Artis Tanahair and the welfare department.

“The irony is I am willing to busk but it’s difficult to do so due to Covid-19,” said the Perak-born Ho, who was struck blind after a bout of measles when he was three.

In the last two years, Baptist has been using her trusty smartphone to record Ho’s renditions in the living room of their two-bedroom apartment and uploading them on WeSing.

But unlike people who have a good grasp of computers and the Internet, Baptist admitted flat out that she struggled to promote her husband’s work on social media platforms.

“I am not a tech-savvy person and we don’t have an editing software. So when Alfred sings, it has to be the full song without any mistakes.

“When his pitching or guitar chords aren’t right, we’d have to re-record the entire song.

“Sometimes it can take us many hours to record just one or two songs,” Baptist lamented.

Despite the challenges, Baptist has managed to upload over 200 of Ho’s songs on his YouTube channel and she’s also created a blog for her loving husband.

Ho's vocal prowess ranges from soothing ballads to rock and roll, and his repertoire includes Spanish, Malay, Cantonese, Japanese and Hokkien songs.

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“I’m not too well-versed with TikTok or Instagram.

“How I wish I could learn the way to promote Alfred’s songs on Spotify. We are willing to pay a small fee for someone to help us.

“We are also looking for someone to help sponsor the cost of producing Albert’s latest CDs,” she said.

Passionate artiste

Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that people with disabilities (PWD) have the right to work on an equal basis with others.

According to the **Malaysian Statistics Department**, the unemployment rate in 2020 rose to 4.8% from 3.2% in 2019.

With thousands of people jobless during the pandemic, it is even more challenging for people with disabilities to gain employment.

Ho is determined to bank on his talent as a singer and guitarist to earn a living.

“I love to sing, and I’ve been a professional singer for over four decades.

“I’ve made appearances at stage shows, private functions and nightspots across the country.

“I had my first brush with fame when I became a semi-finalist in RTM1’s 1970s talent show Bakat TV,” shared Ho, who is often called Malaysia’s Jose Feliciano.

Feliciano is a Puerto Rican musician with vision impairment best known for many international hits, including his rendition of the Doors’ Light My Fire and Christmas single, Feliz Navidad.

In 2017, Ho performed at Asia’s Got Talent (S2), where he serenaded judges with British singer Engelbert Humperdinck’s Quando Quando Quando.

Ho showed a love for music from an early age.

At Penang's St Nicholas School for the Blind, he taught himself to play the guitar and formed a four-piece schoolboy band called The Sharks.

Over the years, the former telephone operator has endeared himself to audiences for his interpretations of evergreen numbers by legendary crooners Elvis Presley, Cliff Richard and Tom Jones.

His vocal prowess ranges from soothing ballads to rock and roll, and his repertoire includes Spanish, Malay, Cantonese, Japanese and Hokkien songs.

Ho has also self-produced six albums consisting of his favourite evergreens.

Baptist strongly believes in her husband's talents and is willing to support him all the way.

"To me, Alfred's spirits has not dampened despite the pandemic. Instead, he is soldiering on with his musical talents.

"I think he has achieved a remarkable feat and I hope his talents will be recognised," she emphasised.

<https://www.thestar.com.my/lifestyle/people/2022/03/14/malaysian-veteran-blind-singer-uses-karaoke-app-to-promote-his-songs-and-earn-a-living>