



RAY  
CORDEIRO

**ALL THE WAY  
WITH RAY**

**MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

## Praise for Ray Cordeiro and *All The Way With Ray*

‘Hong Kong is a remarkable city full of hidden talent, genius and happiness. I was fortunate to have met Ray Cordeiro when I was young. He was already a legend in Hong Kong at the time, a giant in broadcasting and the pioneer of the local music scene. Locals affectionately call him “Uncle Ray”. I was surprised but incredibly flattered when he asked me to write an endorsement for his autobiography. Although I am not a writer, we have known each other for more than half a century and I cannot let go of this rare but valuable opportunity to say a few words about our friendship.

I am a big fan of Uncle Ray and I grew up with his music. In my teens, I joined up with the Kwan siblings Teddy, William and Raymond, and with another pal, Frederick Chan. We called ourselves Teddy Robin and The Playboys and recorded three demos at the home of our friend Ricky Fung and sent them to Uncle Ray with a letter of introduction, which I wrote. We wanted him to be our manager.

We didn’t have much expectation. To our surprise, Uncle Ray called and invited us for a chat at Radio Hong Kong. He admitted we had the potential but explained to us he couldn’t be our manager because he was a government employee. Instead, he helped us secure a recording contract with Diamond Music Limited. This is how the mentorship began, which gradually evolved into a long-time friendship.

Uncle Ray is a gentleman and accommodating towards everyone. He is a hard-working and serious professional, willing to lend a helping hand whenever necessary. He is my role model. During my time with Diamond Music, PolyGram, Universal and EMI, he was always there to encourage and offer support.

Uncle Ray has been the bedrock of my career. He also broadened my horizons by introducing me to the world of horse racing. Horse racing is now my main interest besides music, and I am proud that my devotion to the sport enabled me to help Uncle Ray purchase his colt We Know When from the United States. The horse won five races and was a participant in the last Royal Hong Kong Derby in 1997.



I am very grateful to Uncle Ray. At my son Ronald's concert at the Hong Kong Coliseum, I told the audience: "Without Uncle Ray, there would be no Norman Cheng today. It was Uncle Ray who built a solid foundation for the sixties local music scene and the industry boom in the immediate decades that followed."

I wish Uncle Ray good health and look forward to playing music again on his birthday. I am gladdened whenever I see his beaming face.'

*Norman Cheng Tung Hon*

Former Managing Director of PolyGram, Asia Pacific;

Former Chairman of Gold Typhoon

'There have been many famous leaders in this world since time immemorial. These are all great people who showed leadership and vision. Thanks to them people's lives improved. Nelson Mandela fought against discrimination and for equality, resulting in the abolition of apartheid. Mother Teresa was a humanitarian, aiding the sick, the poor and the destitute, changing their lives for the better. Joseph Murray was a scientist and a physician. He pioneered organ transplants, giving a new lease of life to people who had failed or non-functioning body parts.

Similarly, Uncle Ray is a great man from a different league. A man who, through his contributions to the music industry, has affected people's lives more than many others. Through music, Uncle Ray relaxes people who have been "working like a dog". Through his night-time music programme, he soothes the nerves of those under stress and tension in the dark of the night.

Among many of Uncle Ray's radio programmes that I admire, *All The Way With Ray* affects me most. So many times over the last 30-odd years when I was dead tired after "a hard day's night", attending to my patients or totally deflated by hours of debate during my public duties, it was Uncle Ray's soothing voice and his choice of music after midnight that revitalised me and made me "feel alright" when I turned on the car radio on my way home. He was, and still is, my saviour, even in his 90s.

Uncle Ray came from a broken family. He suffered the pains and brutality of the Japanese occupation during World War II, tasting the

bitterness of hunger and poverty. And yet his vision and passion for music, especially his enthusiasm for drums, drove him on to become an irrefutable guru of the music world and earned him the title of the “World’s Most Durable Radio DJ”.

This book is about the life of this great man. It is more than an autobiography. It depicts a man of humble beginnings rising to international fame through his vision and unceasing determination and passion. It also shows that age is only a number, and no matter what that number may be, one can and will contribute to improve the lives of people.’

*Dr. Edward Leong Che Hung*

Former Chairman of the Hospital Authority;

Former Chairman of the HKU Council

‘Uncle Ray has been in the broadcasting industry for over 70 years. He has been showered with accolades that include an MBE from Queen Elizabeth II, a Bronze Bauhinia Star from the HKSAR and an Honorary Fellowship from the Academy for Performing Arts. He has also been recognised as the “World’s Most Durable Radio DJ”. At the age of 96, Uncle still hosts his show *All The Way With Ray* every Monday through Friday from 10 p.m. to 1 a.m. on Radio 3. His achievement as a broadcaster is unprecedented.

I have known Uncle Ray for over 40 years. He’s a dedicated collector of records, some 20,000 in total. Access to his vast music library is freely given to other disc jockeys at RTHK in search of difficult to find music. In his career, Uncle has interviewed countless singers and musicians. He even had the good fortune to interview The Beatles three times. In my opinion, Uncle Ray is the top DJ in Asia.

When I first started my popular weekly Cantopop chart at Radio 2 (中文歌曲龍虎榜) in 1974, Uncle was already a giant in broadcasting. I was humbled he came to see me and asked if I could share the Chinese songs played on my show with his listeners and help translate relevant details for him. Uncle was a pioneer in introducing Cantopop on an English station. He told me good music has no boundaries. Being a broadcaster, we need to open up to new ideas, something that

has been my motto both as a disc jockey and when I was part of top management at RTHK.

Apart from helping new talent, Uncle does plenty for worthy causes. He always donates part of what he receives as birthday presents to non-profit organisations. I still remember he joined me in full Santa costume to officiate the first-ever Run Santa Run charity event hosted by Hope Worldwide, an international charity organisation, at the Peak in 2014. He is and will always be my “Santa Ray”.’

*Cheung Man Sun*

Former Assistant Director of Broadcasting

‘Uncle Ray has been around for almost a century. He represents the era of East meeting West, economic boom, creativity and innovation.

Returning to Hong Kong from Macau after the war, he became a first-generation disc jockey who still spins everlasting melodies from the 1930s to the 1960s. He started to promote local music in the 1960s, every international superstar who visited Hong Kong was interviewed by him, and every local singer grew up with his radio shows.

Most people have listened to his show since the 1960s, and the 50-odd years that followed were Hong Kong’s golden era.

Uncle Ray is recognised as the “World’s Most Durable Radio DJ” by the Guinness World Records. He has spent 62 of over 70 years as a radio host with Radio Television Hong Kong.

Apart from fighting for press freedom, RTHK is also the bridgehead promoting music culture. Uncle Ray’s mellow and youthful voice and his choice of nostalgic music have kept the locals company for more than half a century, thus helping us to relax whenever we feel exhausted. Nowadays, people can always listen to *All The Way With Ray* online and share with others – the Hongkongers, wherever they are, all the way!’

*Cheung Man Yee*

Former Director of Broadcasting

**ALL THE WAY  
WITH RAY**





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WITH RAY**

**MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

**RAY CORDEIRO**

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To the memory of my dearest mother,  
Livia Pureza dos Santos,  
a remarkable woman to whom I owe so much





***Uncle Ray* by Teddy Robin, 2017.**  
(on loan to the Hong Kong Museum of History)

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■ The first-ever ‘Most Popular Disc Jockey’ in town, 1960s.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This is the story of my life: my autobiography. It is also the story of the music scene for almost a century in Hong Kong.

In the past, I have mainly communicated with fans and listeners through music. This time, however, is different. After years of hard work, I have finally achieved my wish. I am sharing my life story in words and pictures.

While writing the draft, I had flashbacks of the past, prompting extended reflection and contemplation. In experiencing these memories, I ran through the full gamut of emotions: jubilation, sorrow, pride, excitement, fear, anger and satisfaction. The upshot of my collective experiences is that I feel I am fortunate to have lived, and continue to live, a happy and fulfilling life surrounded by music. In retrospect, the twists and turns along the way were so much more than moments of reckoning – they were signposts along a journey of self-discovery. So, I advise all young people to be guided by what they truly desire in their lives. No second-guessing, no regrets. Equally important is to ensure that you not only do what you believe to be right, but something that sparks inner joy.

Reporters have often asked me: ‘How have you sustained a job you have been doing for over 70 years and have you ever thought of giving it up?’

‘Why stop?’ I’ve replied.

Honestly, it doesn’t require much effort. By sharing good music with my fans, I am in my element. I refuse to countenance a world without music.

They have also asked: ‘Did you map out your career? Have you accomplished your career goals?’

‘I never made any ten- or 20-year career plan. Who does in the entertainment industry? The only thing I did was follow the music.’

This has always been my response.

Throughout my career, I have endeavoured to offer support within the industry, exchanged ideas with like-minded people and devoted time and energy to harnessing talent. To this day, I’m ready to play my part, whether it is judging a competition, emceeding an event or assisting in publicity.

The uncomplicated truth is that I do what I love and love what I do.



We are all responsible for our own successes and failures. Ultimately, I have achieved my dearest mother's expectation of making something of myself. Mum brought me into this world, but music has brought richness to my life. Thanks to music, I have found my way to success, happiness and companionship. In writing this book I am taking the opportunity to express my undying gratitude to my listeners, fans, friends and people who are close to me. Your support has given me an endless supply of motivation and confidence. To those who have helped me in times of adversity, I am thankful to you all for your kindness and for enriching my life. To those whom I have helped, I am glad to have been able to pay my own good fortune forward.

Looking back, things might not have been perfect, yet it has been a life full of experiences and personal insights. While this autobiography chronicles my life in Hong Kong from childhood to adult years and provides a glimpse of the changes that took place in the city's music sphere, my hope is that it will also serve to rekindle memories of all our yesterdays, allowing us all to take stock of the lives we have led: the highs, the lows and everything in between.

It is my great pleasure to invite you to come with me, *All the Way with Ray*.

*Ray Cordeiro*

Hong Kong

January 2021

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing an autobiography is never an easy task. The entire process was harder than ever I could have imagined, especially needing to produce independent English and Chinese versions. Having started writing in 2002, it has taken a painstaking 19 years to complete what I hope represents a true labour of love. Along the way, I received plenty of support, guidance and encouragement. The words may be mine, but this is nevertheless a collaborative effort through and through.

I am indebted to Andy Chow, my godson and project manager, who resurrected the endeavour in 2019 and has remained staunchly at my side. Simply, neither book would have happened without him.

Things went south when a key member for the English version pulled out in early 2020. Although time was running short to complete the task as planned, Andy didn't let hope wither. Understanding my wish was to have both versions released simultaneously, he quickly reformed the English editorial team with Graeme Goodair as co-writer and Elaine Dunn as editor. Gary Lance, Dr. Julian Ball, Nicholas Baker, Joanna Chow and Clara Wong also provided valuable assistance. Carol Dyer was later appointed project consultant to provide publishing and layout advice, and she edited the finalised manuscript. Everyone did a stellar job.

Someone else to whom I owe a lot is Norman Cheng. In March 2020, he said to me: 'Being the "Godfather of Pop", your books mean a lot to the local music scene. These are also the collective memories of the Hong Kong people. Both need to be taken seriously.' Norman was planning a concert for my book launch at the Hong Kong Coliseum, but COVID-19 has made this impossible. Norman, supportive as always, has kindly offered to reschedule the concert for my centenary!

Then there is Albert Au, another godson. When he learnt that I was publishing this book, he promised to host a special edition of his radio show to share my happiness with listeners both in Hong Kong and around the world.

Lastly, I am grateful to Tung Tak Newspaper & Magazine Agency Company Ltd for their assistance in distribution.

‘Godfather of mine, and of the Hong Kong music scene for decades! Without Uncle Ray, there would be no Albert Au. I am forever grateful for your contribution to music in Hong Kong!’

*Albert Au*

Disc Jockey and Singer

‘Thank you for the years of wonderful music on *All The Way With Ray*. In this very unsettling time, I get nostalgic and am very grateful that you are still doing what you love and sharing your love of music with us. The world’s a better place for it.’

*Frances Yip*

Singer

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE EARLY YEARS

*Mum, m-my stutter... I can't get rid of it. I-I-I'm at my wit's end.*

*Ray, my son, listen to me. Don't speak too fast. Don't get too excited. Take a deep breath and allow your words to come out freely. You're a smart boy. You can do it.*

‘**D**EAREST MUM, I thank you for your motivational words. You gave me the confidence and belief to overcome my stuttering. You changed my life. Just look at what happiness your encouragement has brought me since.’

When I think back to those early years now, I can only think of my mother. There was no professional help in Hong Kong in the 1930s for a child with a stutter, and it certainly didn't bode well for a future career as a disc jockey – although of course I had no idea at the time that that was what I would wind up being.

Death took my mum from me at too young an age, but her wisdom and encouragement carried me forward. At several significant moments in my early career I have paused and conversed quietly with her.

My only sadness in all of this is that my mother didn't live long enough to share in the real joy that music has brought to my life. But I like to think she knows. This photograph with Armando and me is the



only one I have of her. It is a possession I hold dear, and the likeness is exactly as I remember my mother.



My mother, Livia Pureza dos Santos, flanked by my brother, Armando, left, and me, 1950.

I entered the world as Reinaldo Maria Cordeiro on 12 December 1924, at home, 100A Wan Chai Road, in Wan Chai District, Hong Kong. My family history traces back to Portuguese immigrants seeking better trading prospects in the Greater China region. My grandfather

Procopio Antonio Cordeiro was born in Shanghai but struggled to earn a living. He left for the Portuguese colony of Macau as a refugee and married Vitalina Maria da Luz before finally settling in Hong Kong in 1868. Dad, Luiz Gonzaga Cordeiro, was born and raised in the British colony. Mum, Livia Pureza dos Santos, was born in a barracks in Macau (her father was an army lieutenant) and relocated to Hong Kong with her family at the beginning of the last century.

As best as I can recall Mum telling me, Dad was a keen sportsman and was passionate about football. He was an accounts staffer with the Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Limited when she met him at a Christmas gathering hosted by neighbours in the early 1900s. They were both living in Wan Chai, became lovers and got married in 1911.



With Dad and siblings at home. From left: Marie, Frida, Dad (Luiz Gonzaga Cordeiro), Olga and Molly. Back row: Armando and me.

## MY SIBLINGS

I am the fifth and only surviving sibling of six children. Armando was the eldest, followed by Molly, Frida and Marie, and Olga the most junior. My siblings were fiercely protective of me, suffering as I did from the stutter until my teenage years and constantly mocked by so-called friends and classmates. I had to learn to curb my temper.

We played, laughed and cried but never fought. We were happy kids.

It's fair to say growing up I had no real sense of what my life might be. I didn't know the job of a disc jockey even existed. But I was drawn to music and it was clear soon enough that it would define me, thanks mainly to my brother, Armando.

Armando was my idol and the guiding light in my career – not as a disc jockey but as a musician. I found it inspiring that he successfully taught himself to play reed instruments: alto, tenor and baritone saxophones, and the clarinet, too. Also, he had a collection of 78 rpm records that we would listen to and sometimes sing along to together. That he included me at all in these amateur performances despite being ten years younger was enough. That he let me share in something that even as a kid I knew to be so clearly personal left an indelible impression. There was a deep symbolism to Armando gifting those records to me many years later. It spoke of brotherly love, a trust that something of such great value would receive the care it deserved and, perhaps most of all, a hope that I might follow along my brother's musical path. When eventually they came into my possession, I treated the records with kid gloves.

Armando had long dreamed of becoming a musician. Stuck working in a dreary banking job along with Dad at HSBC, he was determined to try his luck in Shanghai, as many performers did, seduced by the city's cabaret lifestyle that took off in the 1920s. Armando eventually made

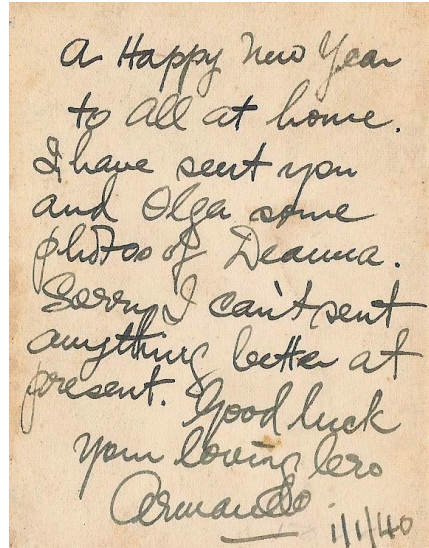


Benny Constantino, centre (in pale tuxedo jacket), with Armando to his left, and the Benny Swing Masters Orchestra. Great Eastern Ballroom, Shanghai, 1940.

it to Shanghai in 1938, joining The Benny Swing Masters Orchestra, the Filipino big band led by Benny Constantino performing in the Great Eastern Ballroom of the Great Eastern Hotel, one of Shanghai's top pre-war hotels. Benny was married to my eldest sister, Molly, and met Armando through her when they were in Hong Kong. Realising a shared passion for band music, a close bond was soon formed.

Molly and Benny lived at home with us until they moved to Shanghai in the mid-1930s. There were many Filipino musicians residing in Hong Kong at the time and on weekends they would congregate at our home to jam with Armando and Benny. Mum would busily prepare meals for our guests – and they always reimbursed her the cost of the food and her labour. Olga and I weren't old enough to engage with the group, but we would have lunch together. It was a great thrill to have all these musicians around.

In Shanghai, Armando was Benny's right-hand man, responsible for the music arrangements of the Benny Swing Masters Orchestra. For over a decade there, Armando elevated himself to becoming a proficient multi-instrumentalist and was ready to lead his own band. Although I missed my brother and sister terribly, they made sure to stay in touch, sending letters, photos of stars and sometimes small gifts. Armando should have gone on to have a shining career, but the end of the Second World War created considerable upheaval throughout China and brought about the collapse of the entertainment scene in Shanghai. Consequently, Armando returned to Hong Kong with Benny and Molly in 1948. After teaming up with my jazz trio for a brief stint, he settled at Rediffusion as a well-known radio programme producer. He sadly succumbed to colon cancer at the age of 55 in 1969, the same year I lost my father.



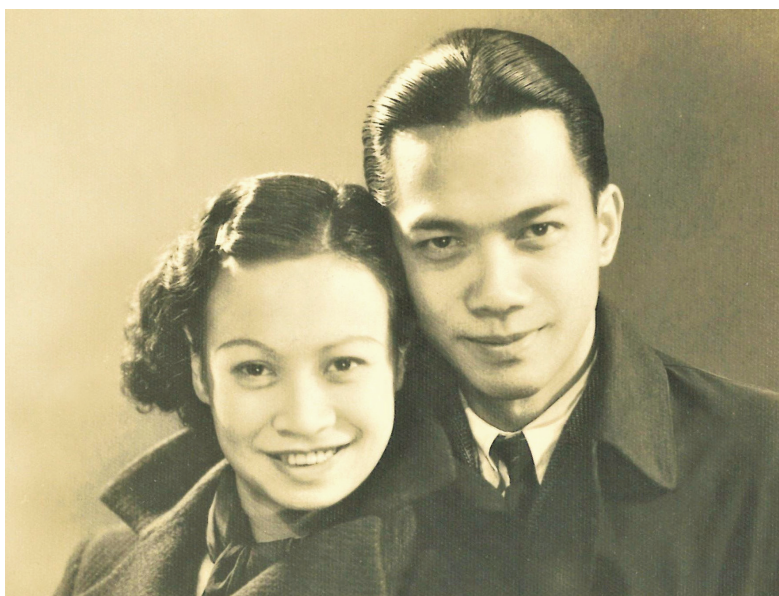
Armando in band dress and his New Year greetings from Shanghai, 1940.

Armando, was not just my brother, but a mentor, a confidant and my best friend. His death was a huge loss to me. The influence he



had on my career had been profound, and fifty years later I still find myself reflecting on it with gratitude.

Molly wasn't a controlling woman except when it came to her husband. Benny's eyes would wander whenever he performed and so, to keep him on a tight leash, she insisted that a table be reserved for her close to the stage. Benny got the message loud and clear. When he died, Molly moved in with me. She passed away in 1983.



■ Benny and Molly Constantino, fourth wedding anniversary, Shanghai, 1939.

My second sister, Frida, was convinced she was a master musician in waiting and ill-advisedly took up the violin, regarded as probably the most difficult instrument to learn. She practised for months on end, testing even Mum's saintly patience, but to no avail. A grating version of 'God Save the King' was the best she could muster. And to think she regularly teased me about my singing voice!

'You sound like Satchmo with a runny nose,' she'd say, referring to the then very popular Louis Armstrong.

‘Pah! It seems like your ears need a good cleaning,’ I’d reply. We were always ribbing each other.

Frida turned out to be an excellent cook, though. Her Portuguese-style minced beef with potato cubes was my absolute favourite. Whenever I eat a similar dish nowadays, I’m immediately reminded of Frida.

Frida married John Minhinnett. Sadly, John lost his life in the fighting at Repulse Bay in the Battle of Hong Kong in 1941, leaving Frida behind with their little daughter, Maureen.

After Mum passed away, Frida took on the role of the family matriarch. It was far from an easy job. She not only looked after her own daughter, Maureen, and her granddaughter, Deanne, who was born in 1965, but found time to give a hand to Molly and Molly’s children when Benny died in the mid-1950s. She also extended her fullest support to me, ensuring there was always food on the kitchen table, that I was appropriately attired for my growing role in radio, and that the non-stop flow of people coming in and out of our home from my life in entertainment were catered to.

For many years, we were a bustling family of six under one roof. But even after needs grew and Maureen and her family moved out and up the street, we would have regular weekly family gatherings: dinner at my home each Thursday and then on Sundays going to church followed by lunch at Club de Recreio or the Kowloon Cricket Club (KCC).

They were truly happy family times. We were all very close.

In her later years, until her death in 1999, Frida lived with me and Molly. This gave me an opportunity to repay her for being such a warm and caring soul when I was young.

Frida, I’ll never forget how you looked after Olga and me so diligently on the way to seeing Dad, and our going together to Rosary Church for service every Sunday.

My third sister, Marie, was an introvert. It broke my heart that she ended up in an abusive relationship with her husband. He had grown up in a huge family of 16, probably devoid of parental love, and had an awful temper, constantly lashing out. I was staying once at Marie's Los Angeles home in the 1980s when I witnessed him bullying her. It wasn't the first time. My siblings and I were well aware of the situation between them but understood that Marie would never consider leaving her husband. She had told us as much. Unable to stand the belligerence any longer, I stormed out of the house. My nephew Frank drove me back to his own home.

Poor Marie suffered so much during her marriage, but despite this, when she passed away in 2013 at the age of 93, she was loyal to her husband to the last. Marie was a saint! I'm glad she's now reunited with Mum, Armando, Frida, Olga and Molly in heaven. She had been my last remaining sibling.

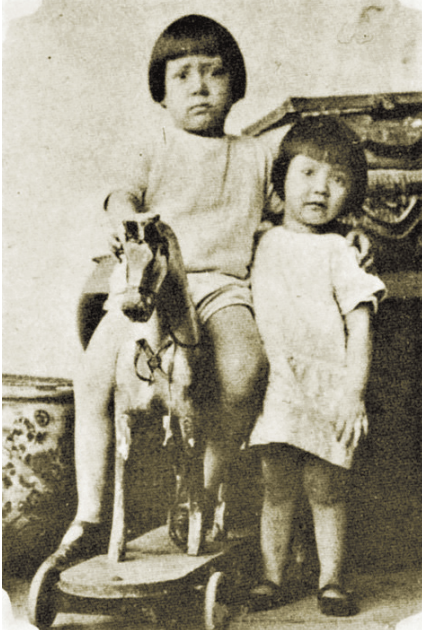
Olga was the sibling closest in age to me and we were joined at the hip. Of all the things we did together, entertaining friends who came to our home was the most fun. Our musical repertoire included Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy's 'Indian Love Call' and, my personal highlight, Bing Crosby and the Mills Brothers' duet 'Dinah'. Mum was so proud of us, acting like the impresarios who had discovered the next big Vegas act.

Olga was lucky to marry Tony Souza, a perfect gentleman and one of the nicest people you could wish to meet. When Tony retired from working at HSBC, he and Olga immigrated to the United States to be nearer to their daughter, Therese, and their grandchildren. Their son, Anthony Souza, chose to stay in Hong Kong to develop his own career. He became a successful banker and now, in retirement, serves as an honorary judge on race days at the Hong Kong Jockey Club.



Olga claimed she could see spirits from a young age and when I stayed at her home for two weeks during my visit to the United States in the 1980s, she would tell me each morning that Mum had visited my room the night before. It comforted me to think that Mum had kept her promise to take care of me at all times.

Olga always made the effort to come back to Hong Kong for my major events and celebrations. She remained content throughout her life, loved by her family, until she passed away in 2008.



First photos. Me, age five, and my younger sister, Olga, age three, 1930.



Frida and her husband, John Minhinnett.

## **A MOTHER'S LOVE**

Life is unpredictable and you never know what waits around the corner. Without warning, Dad abandoned the family in 1930 and left home for his mistress, the house maid. I was five and Olga only three, the two of us too young to process the heartbreak and devastation.

Our living standards changed significantly thereafter, with Mum having to contend with a household heavily in debt while striving to put an optimistic face on everything. Outwardly at least, she was still the same person, full of warmth, kindness and love. She wasn't bitter and didn't complain; scarred but unbowed, she worked exceptionally hard to make ends meet. For a few extra dollars she took in sewing, working until the early hours under the dimmest candlelight and close to exhaustion. She willingly sacrificed herself for those she was devoted to, above all else her children. She was a selfless mother and an extraordinary woman.

Despite his betrayal, Mum always taught us to respect Dad. People would often ask: 'Do you hate your father?' My answer has always been 'No.' I felt devastated for Mum, but I couldn't despise my dad.

The truth is, in such times it wasn't considered that scandalous for men to have mistresses. Whatever Mum's true feelings, she was adamant that we children maintain a presence in Dad's life. Olga and I visited him at his workplace on his birthday and over the Christmas and New Year holidays – accompanied by Frida, six years my senior, at Mum's insistence. Frida would hang back as we waited for Dad in the huge hall of the HSBC building; she never went inside. This was the second HSBC building, demolished in 1934. When Dad saw us, he would greet us with, 'How *are* you?' and then reach into his pocket to give us each a Hong Kong dollar coin. The coins were silver and

remained in circulation until 1935, when the third generation HSBC building opened, with its famous ornate mosaic ceiling. Once home, we gave these large one-dollar pieces to Mum for 'safekeeping', but with the understanding that she meant they would go towards family expenses. A dollar could buy a lot then!



■ The Hong Kong dollar silver coin of my early childhood.

Mum was fully occupied with housework and cooking for the family, though I was taught to make my own breakfast. Another daily responsibility was to boil drinking water. These fundamental skills were enough to set me up for my job as a cook during the war years in Macau.

I was at that time a fan of Johnny Weissmuller. He had won five Olympic gold medals for swimming and starred in the film *Tarzan*. One day, while pretending to be Tarzan at home by swinging to and fro from the mosquito net hanging above my bed, I lost my grip and fell, head-first, into a clay pot. A great commotion erupted in the house. Mum, of course, came to my rescue the moment she heard my cry. She broke the pot without hesitation and my precious little noggin was saved! Another distressing experience was when Mum took me to see *Dracula*, starring a very sinister Bela Lugosi as the Count, at a neighbourhood cinema. I was so terrified that Dracula would come and drain my blood in the dark that I dared not close my eyes and fall asleep in the nights that followed. Mum was there again, lying by my side every night until my fear subsided.

There were plenty of other times growing up that I leant on Mum but none so affecting as her helping me to conquer my stuttering when I was 16. It had gotten so crippling that no amount of teenage bravado or self-confidence could keep the desperation from closing in on me. There was little medical help in those days for the condition. It wasn't so much the power of her words, I think, that brought about a turnaround in fortunes but the certainty in her voice. I took a newfound belief and practised relentlessly until my perseverance paid off. My stutter disappeared, and it has never returned. That I have been a disc jockey since 1949, two years before my mother died, is proof indeed of the power of her love for me.

Mum spent very little time outside of the house. One weekend I thought she deserved a break and persuaded her to go with me for a stroll in Central. She stopped in front of the upmarket Sincere Department Store for what seemed an eternity to admire a fur coat displayed in the shop window. Her desire to own the coat was obvious even though she knew it was an impossible dream. In 1949, I used my entire first pay cheque from Rediffusion to buy her that fur. It was only a small token of appreciation as far as I was concerned, but it meant so much to her coming from her younger, once stuttering, son. She treasured the coat but, sad to say, never got the chance to wear it. The coat was passed on to Frida.

I am blessed that the Lord gave me a mother with such unfailing love, but her flame was extinguished too soon. As much as she displayed a stoic attitude for years after Dad drifted out of the picture, stress and anxiety – and quite likely grief – saw her health gradually decline. Doctors were unable to confirm an official diagnosis and various treatments had little to no effect. We watched on in anguish as her condition deteriorated further. When Dad went to visit her at

St. Paul's Hospital for the last time, she implored him to look after his children. He promised he would.

Mum finally passed away on 25 August 1951. On that fateful day, my whole world descended into darkness. I realised that I had lost the person I loved most. But I was strong enough to know that life must go on and vowed to keep the family together and work even harder. That was Mum's final wish.

'I'll always watch over you,' Mum told me in a whisper as she lay dying. I knew that to be true.

I have always maintained that no matter how many relationships you go through and however long it takes, one day you'll eventually end up with the right life partner or spouse. The magic of a mother's love, however, is unique and can never be replaced.



■ The Cordeiro family two years after Mum's death, 1953.

## MY CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL DAYS

All the Cordeiro children attended St. Francis Xavier's Canossian School in Wan Chai from kindergarten. It had a chapel where I received my first communion when I was eight. I looked rather cute at that age and was given the nickname Limey, having been told I looked like a proper little English gentleman! I was Limey to my family and neighbours.

When Olga and I were kids, Armando doled out pocket money whenever he received his pay cheque from HSBC. We enjoyed going to the movies together at the popular Oriental Theatre cinema on Fleming Road in Wan Chai. It had opened in 1932 and we would buy a single ticket and squeeze into the same seat. The ticket collector always let us in so long as we did not cause any trouble. It was a treat watching my favourite sweethearts of the silver screen, Jeannette Macdonald and Nelson Eddy. When technicolour films were later introduced, a standout was Errol Flynn in *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, a movie I saw numerous times. Of the Walt Disney films, I was fond of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Pinocchio*.

Electricity was a luxury in the 1930s and we relied on charcoal for cooking. When during the Japanese invasion that became unavailable, we resorted, like many others, to chopping down trees for firewood. After the Japanese had removed most of the trees on the hillside, we were forced to burn discarded furniture or anything else we could collect that was flammable.

Mum was a terrific cook. I loved everything she made, particularly her curries. Being Portuguese, we ate *aluar* (a sweetmeat) and *empada* (savoury pastries), traditional Christmas and New Year snacks. The family also enjoyed local festive delicacies: rice dumplings for Dragon Boat Festival, mooncakes for Mid-Autumn Festival and turnip cakes





■ My first communion, 1933.

at Chinese New Year. Most of the time, though, we ate frugally. Butter, for example, was expensive. We could rarely afford it and I developed a taste for fermented bean curd as a replacement. It's delicious on bread or toast and is definitely worth trying, at least once. What dish do I crave most? As far back as I can remember that would be *cheung fun*, traditional steamed rice flour rolls smothered with sweet chilli, sesame and soya sauces. Whenever I meet up with my friends for dim sum, they know it is a must-order item.

An old Chinese lady called Pat Leung, whom Mum relied heavily on as a moneylender, used to visit from time to time. To us kids, she was just another family friend. We had no idea that the reason Pat would call on us was to collect loan repayments. One day Olga and I decided to play a prank on her. We erected two bamboo sticks supporting a pillow above the main door. When she arrived and pushed open the door to make her usual grand entry, the pillow came down on her head. Pat cursed us in her distinctive Cantonese accent. I had rarely seen Mum so angry as she scolded us for our disrespect. Suitably chastened, we promised never to do anything like that again, and then quickly ran off.

With financial support from Armando after he joined HSBC, and a small share also from Molly and Benny, we moved to number 22 Johnston Road opposite the Methodist Church. Among our neighbours were the Sousae family living on the ground floor and the Wilkinsons next door. The children seldom ventured outside onto the street and instead played along the corridors. We had a lot of fun together, and our fair share of fights. Whenever I was overpowered by the Sousae brothers, Olga would come to my rescue.

I was close with the Sousae boys, all five of whom attended St. Joseph's College, as I would. William was the oldest and my best friend. He loved the trumpet of Harry James. Ernie taught me how to play



snooker and was junior champion of Club Lusitano. Next was football-mad Luiz, nicknamed Luigi. Eddie, the fourth brother, graduated from law school and later helped me in legal matters, gratis. Finally, there was Danny. He found it hard to fit in with our crowd because he was the youngest, but he was fun to hang around with from time to time.

The eldest from the Wilkinson brood, Connie, was involved in a secret relationship with Armando. I remember the day Connie's mother stormed into our home demanding to see her daughter and Mum. She was known to have a short fuse, but the level of her rage on this occasion bordered on frightening. Nobody in our family had the slightest inkling of what had set her off to such an extent. She strode menacingly towards Armando's room and proceeded to drag Connie out from behind the door. Connie was in a flood of tears, insisting she had done nothing wrong.

I wasn't mature enough to understand what all the commotion was about, but in retrospect it was the earliest indication that my brother was popular with the ladies and the episode marked the first in a long line of affairs to follow. So it came as a genuine shock when out of the blue some ten years on, Armando casually revealed that he was married to Ann – an employee at Chantecler Bakery and Restaurant, where we were performing at the time.

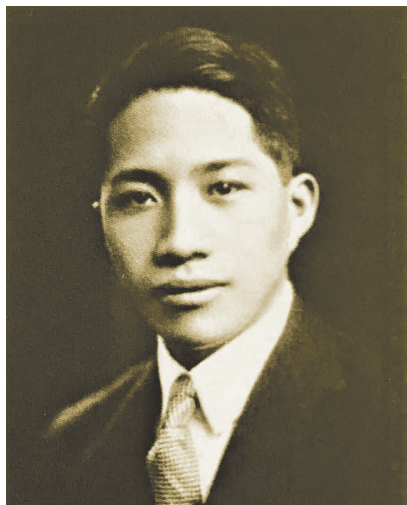
Norma, the second Wilkinson daughter, resembled Princess Elizabeth, later to become Queen Elizabeth II. Although I was only ten, I had a massive crush on her (just puppy love, I guess).

Following in the footsteps of my father and brother, I enrolled for secondary school at St. Joseph's College, an important chapter in my life. The all-boys school is located on Kennedy Road in the Mid-Levels. Most students walk up a steep slope from the lower terminus of the Peak Tram to reach school every morning – good daily exercise for all Josephians.

St. Joseph's College has produced many high-profile alumni in its 146 years of sustained academic excellence. Among them: the late Sir Charles Kuen Kao, GBM, pioneer of fibre optics in telecommunications and Nobel Prize in Physics winner in 2009, and my neighbour in the 1960s, and good friend Dr. Edward Leong Che Hung, GBM JP, a prestigious doctor and former chairman of the Hong Kong University Council and Hospital Authority. The school also continues a proud record of scholastic sports success, with numerous trophies and medals won for athletics, football, table tennis, basketball, swimming and many more.

The current school system is to have classes from Form 1 to 6, but we went from Class 8 to 1. The headmaster was Brother John. I started in Class 8-A, which mainly comprised foreign nationals. We were a truly unruly bunch. Mr. Vincent Chan was our language teacher. He wrote and spoke perfect English. If it wasn't for him, I would never have acquired enough proficiency in the English language to become a disc jockey.

One day, I was sitting near the window in class, distracted by the planes flying over Victoria Harbour, when Mr. Chan addressed me. Receiving no response, the result was predictably bad. I not only had to stay behind after class but, typical of school corporal punishment at the time, received three strokes of a rattan cane on my outstretched hand. It was as painful as it sounds. It was also a life-changing lesson: from then on, I always paid attention to people of authority and what they had to say.



My English teacher, Mr. Vincent Chan.

As in all schools, there were good and bad teachers. One I didn't much care for was exceedingly tough and even more terrifying. He habitually accosted the students and was known on occasion to yank a boy's shirt until the buttons popped off. Nobody dared retaliate. Today, he would have faced disciplinary action, if not outright dismissal. I saw him at the school swimming gala some ten years ago. Pushing 100, he must have mellowed with age because he had a far friendlier manner than I had remembered.

For every ill-tempered teacher, there were plenty of decent ones, like Mr. Roy Pereira. Out of school, he ran a restaurant attached to his farm in Tai Po that specialised in curry. Mr. Pereira was a fine cook and prepared the dishes himself when a group of students (the good and obedient ones) got invited to his farm. Then there was Mr. Felix Chun, whom the famous Cantonese actor Lung Kong resembled in the 1960s. The best teacher was probably Mr. Oi Eng Bee. Unflappable, engaging and witty, he was venerated by pupils and faculty alike.

It never bothered me that I wasn't the brightest student. Truth be told, I was more into sports than studying and later became preoccupied with girls. (On more than one occasion it seemed I was just a step away from the altar!) Academic qualifications are of course important but not the be all and end all of one's life. I heard many success stories of people becoming high achievers through skills acquired outside school. That was my aim, too. As I have mentioned many times in my life, it is important that you try your hand at different sorts of work until you have a clear vision of what really appeals and then go for it. Financial gain shouldn't be ignored, but genuine job satisfaction is a more compelling motivator. What's the use of having money yet feeling miserable?

The key is to connect to what you're doing and do it to the best of your ability. Remember also to stay positive. Challenges exist to be overcome; just be ready to tackle them head on and don't waver. This is life experience.

The fights after school were legendary. Boys would gather at one of two different venues – the Murray Barracks parade ground or the school handball ground – and turn them into a gladiatorial arena of combatants surrounded by raucous spectators. It's unlikely that the brothers in charge of St. Joseph's knew about the fights, or they chose to turn a blind eye to what was going on, perhaps with a tacit understanding that young, testosterone-filled lads just needed to let off some steam.

As it was the most accessible, we tended to assemble at the handball ground, which happened to be in front of the most foul-smelling toilets imaginable. The stench was overwhelming, not that we cared. I was a regular participant in the bouts and one adversary that stood out was a loudmouth who perpetually made fun of me because of my stutter but clearly wasn't a scrapper. He received such a pounding that he was left sobbing and begging for mercy. It's safe to say he never bothered me again.

Among several sporting interests, I loved football the most. My friends and I normally played in the unsuitably narrow area of the school's lower ground level. It didn't spoil our fun – when avoiding coming to blows during matches, that is. I was also partial to our version of handball. Single competitors or teams of two took turns slamming a tennis ball against the wall; a point would be scored if the rebound hit your opponent. Annoyingly, the only convenient place to play it was in the immediate vicinity of the abominable toilets. Junior boys engaged themselves in games of marbles during recess on the

sand path of the lower ground level of the school. Whoever got there first dictated who would be partnered up with whom, often leading to – you guessed it – heated exchanges or even bust-ups.

For many, myself included, school memories are a reminder of simpler, carefree times and when all seemed right in the world. I have returned to St. Joseph's on several occasions and, although much of it has long been demolished or rebuilt, some things remain: the same rusty stair railings, for one. Oh, and those awful toilets!



**CLASS 7-A**

*From Left to Right.*

- Sitting:** P. G. Gilbert, John Anderson, Rev. Bro. Alban (*Form Master*), Poon Tso Yut, Francis Botelho.  
**2nd Row:** Rene Ohl, Henry Crestejo, Marcos Roza, Alvaro Andres, Simon Lee, Paulo Rosa, Gustavo Fong, H. Tavares, R. Barradas, Francis Gutierrez.  
**3rd Row:** Edward Pereira, Harvey To, Dick Gutierrez, Victor Gutierrez, H. Tominaga, Hakuno Sha, To Wing Kwong, Fu Tack Sing, Liem Thian San, Lee Pak Cheong.  
**Back Row:** Henry Carmo, Chan Tek Cheong, John Castilho, Wong Chak Lam, Lam On Sui, H. Nomura, Peter Fallon, R. Cordeiro, Freddy Morales, Dicky Becker.

Class 7-A, St. Joseph's College, 1935. Me, back row, third from right. (Courtesy of Principal Ching of St. Joseph's and Brother Patrick Tierney, in whose possession the photo is.)



## Snapshots with My Family



Frida's birthday celebration at Club de Recreio. From left: Zoe Siqueira (son-in-law), Maureen Siqueira (daughter), Deanne Siqueira (granddaughter) and me, Frida seated, 15 March 1992.



With Olga for my 80th birthday party in conjunction with the Po Leung Kuk charity. HKCEC, 2004.



Olga and Frida's families from the United States and Portugal, respectively, attending my 88th birthday at the InterContinental hotel, 2012. From left: Zoe and Deanne Siqueira, Margaret Leung, Christopher Lance, Maureen Siqueira, me, Therese, Gary and Jessica Lance, and Anthony Souza.



Armando's children and my godson. Back from left: Jenny Cordeiro, Andy Chow, Yvonne, Jackie, Michael; front: me, Chiu Fong and Bobby Cordeiro at my 94th birthday party, 2018.



Marie's family: Frank and Aling Crestejo at my 95th birthday party, 2019.



‘For countless years, Uncle Ray’s music has never failed to set the right mood for Hong Kong people, whether they’re happy or in a difficult moment. He is the most lovable man in HK.’

*Michael Hui*

Film Director, Actor and Comedian

‘The path of Hong Kong’s music was created by the generations who walked before us. But one voice is recognised as being a constant when it comes to reaching out to listeners across the radio waves: our beloved Uncle Ray. The most respected of disc jockeys, he is “all the way” a legend and an institution of Hong Kong’s broadcasting history.’

*Danny Summer*

Singer

## CHAPTER TWO

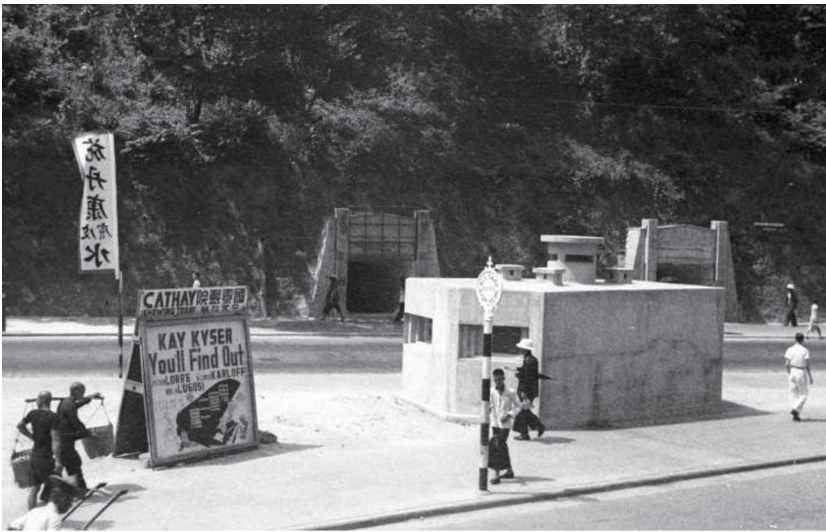
# WARTIME IN HONG KONG AND MACAU

**O**N 8 DECEMBER 1941, four days before my 17th birthday and four hours after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, the Second World War reached Hong Kong. That day, Japanese war planes known as Zero fighters flew across the colony in what appeared to be some sort of mass military aircraft training exercise. At first, we remained unperturbed, but when unidentifiable objects dropping from the sky began to explode over Kai Tak airfield we realised that the horror unfolding was literally a matter of life and death. People were shocked, and that shock turned to panic as they scrambled for cover in a network of air-raid tunnels the government had constructed as shelters for the population in anticipation of an invasion.

It was dark and suffocating inside the tunnels as those who took shelter tended to crowd the entrance, impeding the airflow. People were forced deeper in with each new arrival. Children were crying and the women wailing. Desperation had taken hold and the war was only in its infancy. Air Raid Precautions (ARP) officials soon shepherded people further into the tunnels and the panic subsided. The ventilation in most ARP tunnels in Hong Kong was good.

One of the closest shelters to our home was the Arsenal Street tunnel whose entrance was on Queen's Road East, where, although

now sealed, its portals can still be seen. The first time I used it was the day the bombardment began. As soon as we heard the warning siren, the family ran to the shelter and remained there until another siren sounded the all-clear, and we could return home. Listening to the shelling in the tunnel's dim light was eerie, especially not knowing when it would end. I probably took shelter there two or three times during the months I remained in Hong Kong.

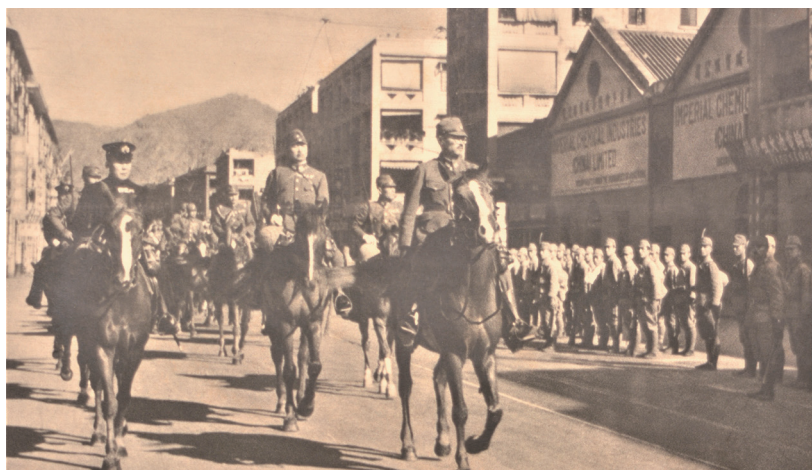


Preparation for invasion, late 1941. Portals to the Arsenal Street tunnel; British Army post in the foreground. (Courtesy AGSL, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries.)

While this network of underground tunnels had been hastily dug across Hong Kong Island and the Kowloon Peninsula in 1940 and 1941 to protect civilians, when Japanese ground troops swooped in after days of aerial bombardment, the British Forces were left vulnerable. Outnumbered, their surrender wasn't long in coming. The Japanese had begun to cross the Shum Chun River using makeshift bridges as early as 8 December, and in the week that followed, the regiments of the Hong Kong garrison in the New Territories had done their best to rebuff them

and slow their progress. When ten days later Japanese soldiers reached Hong Kong Island, the defending forces, military and civilian alike, fought bravely and desperately. But the casualties they suffered were heavy. These included my brother-in-law, John Denniford Minhinnett, in the fighting at Repulse Bay. John was a volunteer who signed up wishing to defend the city. He perished a war hero.

Japan captured Hong Kong on Christmas Day 1941 and ruled without mercy. Their soldiers pillaged the colony, torturing, bayoneting and shooting looters or anyone they took a dislike to, and raping women at will. They showed a callous disregard to the British dead and wounded, many of the latter dying before they could be got to medical help. It shocked me to the core when I first saw dead bodies lying in the neighbourhood streets. Life was not treasured and respected in wartime.



Japanese ceremonial entry into the Kowloon Peninsula, 28 December 1941.  
(Courtesy HM Research Service.)

As the occupation continued, soldiers robbed passers-by of watches and jewellery, and anybody who failed to bow in their presence would suffer the butt of a rifle for such insolence. One day I was approached

by some Japanese soldiers and was genuinely fearful for my life, but then I noticed their leader walking in front. He was a classmate from St. Joseph's College. Despite the tension we smiled and chatted for a while. I was relieved to emerge unscathed that time, but I was unnerved by the fact that a fellow student of just a couple of months earlier was now an enemy – and a deadly one at that.

This 'little spy' was proof, if proof was needed, that the Japanese were well prepared for the invasion long before the war started. It also rapidly dawned on me that venturing outside was now highly precarious and I needed to have my guard up in even the most seemingly innocuous circumstances.

Food shortages were soon a major concern in the war. The Japanese solution for this was to adopt a policy of what amounted to involuntary repatriation of the local Chinese population to mainland China. To expedite the process, a special task force was set up in January 1942 arranging one-way transportation by train or ship out of Hong Kong for citizens who hadn't already fled to Guangdong province out of fear of further mistreatment. Many couldn't afford the cost of travel and had to leave on foot instead. Parents were forced to make the tough choice of which child to leave behind. The journey itself to China could scarcely have been more traumatic. En route, family members were separated or lost, and people died of hunger and sickness, to say nothing of those who were robbed of their money. Towards the end of Japanese rule, people were even forcibly seized and deported. The population in Hong Kong fell dramatically from 1.6 million in early 1942 to 600,000 over the course of the rest of the war.

Life was hard during the war years. For the women, subjected to gross exploitation and worse, it was unbearable. Mum, Frida, Marie and Olga decided to escape to Macau, the neutral Portuguese colony

40 miles from Hong Kong, which the Japanese had not occupied (although later in the war they were to install Japanese ‘advisors’ there). Before setting off, Mum took me aside and told me that I wouldn’t be travelling to Macau with them.

‘I want you to stay in Hong Kong with your dad,’ she said.

I think it was important to her to have me support my father and form a father-son relationship, whatever his transgressions. I trusted Mum to know best.

Dropping me off at the door of Dad’s residence, her message to him was short and to the point: ‘Ray is your son. We’re going to Macau. I’m placing him in your care.’ That was it. A kiss on my cheek and she was gone.

Dad fulfilled his fatherly duties, overseeing my welfare and safety. I stayed with him on and off for more than a decade. Soon after I joined Radio Hong Kong (RHK) in 1949, Dad approached me for financial assistance. I knew him to be a very proud man and he wouldn’t have asked for anything had he not been desperate. I agreed to a regular HK\$300 stipend at a time when my monthly salary was only \$1,380.

## **ESCAPE TO MACAU**

The Hongkong and Shanghai Bank fell under total Japanese control from the outset of the occupation. As Dad explained it, for bank employees like him who were persuaded to stay on and maintain the pretence of ‘business as usual’, it was a relative safe haven in light of the ongoing crackdown on citizens elsewhere. Two years later, in 1943, however, that all changed. A systematic purge was ordered, and HSBC was no longer safe for the local staff. In what turned out to be the best move of my life, Dad instructed me to join the rest of the family in Macau. They were living in the Tung Hui refugee camp, and when I arrived at the territory’s

pier, Frida was there to welcome me. The meagre food supplies that they had all been forced to live off for two years had resulted in general hunger and she looked so emaciated that at first I didn't recognise her. Dad also left for Macau a few days later to reunite with his second family; they likewise had earlier fled to the Portuguese colony.

I was appointed Mum's assistant cook in Macau. She was responsible for the meals of 140 refugees. It was no joke. The wok we used was literally the size of a jacuzzi tub, not to mention the massive shovel we employed as a stirrer. It was hard labour. The physical exertion would have tested even the fittest of men, let alone a malnourished housewife and her inexperienced 18-year-old son. Still, it was immensely satisfying to contribute to helping feed so many refugees.

Compared with the volatility in Hong Kong, Macau was a paradise. On top of the food and shelter provided by the local government, the British Consulate there gave Hong Kong refugees a small monthly allowance in exchange for carrying out various duties around camp. Determined to better provide for my mother and sisters, I explored ways to supplement this and earn extra cash. There was a medical clinic in the middle of the camp, which refugees could attend if they were sick. However, the dispensary, the Pharmacia Popular (now part of the World Heritage Site declared by UNESCO in 2005), was in the centre of the old town, an inconvenient 20-minute walk away. When I noticed that most of the patients were elderly and had difficulty getting there, I sensed an opportunity. I charged 30 cents to have a prescription filled and collected. That amounted to a couple of dollars a day. I reared ducklings, too. They loved marching in formation behind the kitchen where I worked. It was such fun to watch them going through their routine. When they matured, they laid eggs that I sold. Moneywise, I was doing quite well.





The Pharmacia Popular on Largo do Senado. Although recent, this photo is as I remember the dispensary in 1943.

The Tung Hui camp was in fact housed in a large twin-decked, abandoned river steamer that was now docked alongside a quay near the Canidrome, the greyhound racing stadium. The vessel was affectionately named ‘The Hulk’ by those who lived on it and was just one of several camps in the Portuguese colony. Life on board was mundane but more pleasant than at most other camps. At least we could take a dip in the sea whenever we fancied. We could access the shore from the ship by way of a gangplank and were free to come and go as we wished. Each refugee family was assigned a cabin on the main deck, above which was an open promenade deck. The clinic was on the lower deck, as was the kitchen, where the ducks conducted their marching routine appropriately close to the water!

Apart from swimming as a recreation, we organised friendly sparring sessions with our counterparts living at the Fai Chi Kai camp, although they regularly turned into proper boxing matches,



the outcome of which people would bet on. On one occasion, I was up against an intimidating-looking Caucasian man, who to my disbelief I knocked out in the first round!

Also, most afternoons we would settle for a game of mah-jong. I was rather good at it and loved playing with two old ladies who always lost money. On one particularly stifling day, anxious to escape the kitchen I raced up to the vessel's main deck to be sure of getting a table. In my eagerness, I crashed against the ship's rail and broke my arm. It took months to heal. My mah-jong and boxing careers were on hold, but life is full of surprises and something better was just around the corner.

The refugees of Tung Hui would often gather on the top deck of the ship in the evening to watch the sunset or bathe in the moonlight. These were enjoyable activities and cost us nothing. Against this romantic backdrop, I became very attracted to a teenage girl, also a refugee. My feelings towards her were reciprocated and so we embarked on a year-long love affair. Her parents eventually found out about us and demanded we separate. I was so in love with her and had a rotten time getting over it. This was my first serious relationship and it felt as if the whole world was punishing me.

My last New Year's Eve at Tung Hui was a turning point in my life. A big band led by the splendidly named Pinky Pineda were invited for the New Year Ball. Everybody was looking forward to a great evening. I loved drums the most out of all musical instruments and so I situated myself behind the drummer. It was the first time I had been so up-close-and-personal onstage, and it was inspiring. The band were stomping out Glenn Miller's 'In the Mood' and other big band favourites. I scrutinised the drummer's every move, thinking he was the star attraction, the one holding the band together with his steady beat. With immediate and intense clarity, I knew that this was exactly what *I* wanted to do!

After the party, I was more obsessed than ever with drumming. However, I didn't have a drum set. I couldn't afford one. My good friend Gene Tavares and I improvised by making use of all the pots and pans in the kitchen and a pair of chopsticks, driving Mum to distraction in the process. So there I was, without a band, direction and even without a real drum set; but I was single-minded that out of this I would somehow forge a career.

'Ray,' I told myself, 'just keep drumming, and when you get out of this hole you too can hit the high life.'

## **THE POST-WAR YEARS**

When I did eventually return to Hong Kong after war ended, I closely followed Gene Krupa and Buddy Rich, the drummers of Benny Goodman and Artie Shaw, respectively. Listening to those two helped improve my drumming dramatically. As luck would have it, my sister Frida gave me a drum set that had belonged to her deceased husband. It became my most prized possession. I even drew a portrait of my idol Artie Shaw on the bass drum.

I was not quite 21 when I left Macau in 1945. I felt passionately about music, and as well as continuing to hone my drum skills I learnt to play the harmonica, recognising that it was a relatively easy reed instrument to master. Unlike the drums, it was also pocketable, and I had it with me almost all the time, although I was never to play it with any of my bands.

In an era before portable listening devices, such as the radio receiver, Walkman, Discman and iPod – let alone audio streaming – a man with a harmonica could prove popular for impromptu entertainment. The war years had generated some wonderful songs and to be able to reach for my mouth organ and play tunes such as 'As Time Goes By'

(from the film *Casablanca*) was all that was needed to encourage a nostalgic singalong. ‘You must remember this/A kiss is just a kiss/A sigh is just a sigh...’ I can still hear friends singing it now!

I continued to play the instrument for a long while, but the sixties brought a seismic change in music style and the guitar now reigned supreme. My career as a disc jockey was also taking off and I slowly cast my harmonica aside. However, it has not been forgotten and, in fact, will be on display at the Hong Kong Museum of History for its planned exhibition in 2022 of Portuguese life in Hong Kong.

### **A Job as a Prison Warder**

Japan’s unconditional surrender came with unexpected suddenness on 15 August 1945 following the dropping of atomic bombs by the US on Hiroshima and then Nagasaki. Many dared not believe deliverance had finally come. I was among the first group of refugees to arrive back in Hong Kong to find work, but disappointingly the only job openings were in government departments and at HSBC.

Then we heard that Stanley Prison, which the Japanese had used as an internment camp, was looking for staff and about 25 of us, all Portuguese, hiked our way there to try our luck. A recruitment notice at the main gate advertised the need for warders. We immediately applied and were interviewed, as it fortuitously happened by a Portuguese prison official. He employed us all. The monthly pay wasn’t great, just a hundred-odd dollars, but we had food to eat and dormitories to stay in. There were some 300 or so prisoners in the facility, but we were assigned the Chinese inmates only as the Japanese prisoners of war were handled by the British. In addition to our wages, we received a bag full of canned goods; these we would sell to hawkers in Stanley Market to increase our spending money.



Stanley Prison, late 1930s; dormitories in the background. (Courtesy of the Hong Kong Correctional Services Department.)

Working at the prison wasn't as tough, busy or unpleasant as one might imagine. In fact, job satisfaction was fairly high. We even had time to sit around and play mah-jong. On weekends, I went home to see Dad. Mum, Frida, Marie and Olga were still in Macau.

I had intended my job as a warder only to be temporary, but it ended sooner than planned in an extraordinary fashion.

One day while patrolling the cells, I noticed a young prisoner weeping uncontrollably. I unlocked the door to his cell.

'What's up?' I asked him in Cantonese. He explained that he had just been given a lengthy sentence for shooting a police officer in the leg. There was no doubt that he had been carrying a gun.

'But it was an accident,' he protested. 'I'm in the prime of life. I'll come out an old man.'

There was something about him that resonated with me. We became friendly and conversed daily in his cell.

The favours the prisoner asked of me were small at first. Would I deliver a letter to his wife living in Western District? Not that travelling there from Stanley was a simple or cheap journey at that time, mind you, but I obliged to the gratitude of both. A few months later came the bombshell. Would I help him to escape? Suddenly, it was clear what his motive had been all along.

‘What can I possibly do?’ I exclaimed.

He suggested I slip him a warder’s uniform to disguise his identity and he could then simply walk out of the prison. No way was I actually going to facilitate a breakout, and yet lying awake later that night I found myself in turmoil. There was a sense that the prisoner was genuinely ashamed of his deceit given the amity we had established. And hadn’t I strung him along just as much if I never doubted that he was guilty of his crime? I spoke to Dad, who concluded my situation at the prison had become untenable.

‘Quit, son,’ he said, ‘and come and join me at HSBC.’

It wasn’t an appealing suggestion, but realising it was the only way out of an uncomfortable situation I accepted his advice. I never found out what happened to the prisoner.

The Hong Kong Correctional Services celebrated its centenary in 2020, and in June that year I was invited as a special guest to Stanley Prison, where a tour the compound had been arranged for me. The main gate from 75 years ago had been replaced, but the dormitory I stayed in appeared unchanged. The century-old bronze bell (manufactured in 1895 in the United Kingdom) used for fire alerts, and now turned green from oxidation, still hung in the courtyard. During the tour, we also visited Prison No. 1. This was already in use at my time, and although inmate facilities and welfare are much improved, incarceration still means a loss of freedom.

A reminder, then, to cherish one’s liberties and be law-abiding.

## I Move to HSBC

In the early 20th century, the Hong Kong Government, HSBC and other foreign companies took on many Portuguese workers who were multilingual and could liaise between the English-speaking management and the local Chinese.

According to information provided by HSBC, when war was declared in Hong Kong, the bank offered to subsidise the travel to Macau of its Portuguese staff to wait out the conflict. In 1946, the staff's readiness to travel back enabled a speedy reopening of the Hong Kong office. As a token of appreciation, the bank made bonus payments to the Portuguese based on their seniority: HK\$3,000 to staff whose years of service exceeded 20 years; \$2,500 for those with over 15 years on the job; and \$1,000 to the rest. My father received \$3,000. These payments were intended to help staff rebuild their homes, many of which had suffered bombing damage. An additional sum of \$10,000 was donated to Club de Recreio, a recreation centre for the Portuguese community.

Most of the Portuguese were employed as accounting staff at HSBC. They had a strong work ethic and a reputation for loyalty. I remember Dad telling me the bank once faced a serious financial crisis and was on the verge of bankruptcy. The willingness of the Portuguese staff to work without pay was instrumental in allowing the bank time to recover. Afterwards, HSBC introduced a special housing scheme offering the Portuguese the opportunity to buy property at Luso Apartments in Beacon Hill at



■ A studio photo of me at age 22, 1947.

well below market value. Olga's husband, Tony Souza, was one of the beneficiaries.

However, in the 1970s everything changed when HSBC shifted their focus to recruiting local Chinese because the Portuguese couldn't read and write Chinese at a time when the language was becoming commercially important. The same happened in other major enterprises, such as China Light and Power, and in government departments. It caused many Portuguese to emigrate overseas for the benefit of their children.

Leaving the prison on Dad's advice, I joined him at the bank and started in the accounts department under the supervision of Caesar Baptista. Famed for his pipe smoking, he was a good boss and friend. A year later, I transferred to the outward bills team and worked for Frankie Collaco, who reminded me of Buster Keaton – which is to say, all silent and serious.

I enjoyed my work on the London desk, which was part of outward bills, with new friends, Jack Brown, Manuel Sarazolla, Gustan D'Aquino and Philip Ivanovich. We shared a great camaraderie, often joking that the ledgers we had to carry were so huge and heavy we should have qualified as removal men as well – and been paid extra! However, it wasn't always so harmonious. As the months went by, underqualified managers began arriving at the bank from England and increasingly spoilt the workplace atmosphere. They were in their early 20s and knew almost nothing about local banking operations, learning on the job from their more seasoned Portuguese counterparts. Once they became competent, they started throwing their weight around. It reached a point where I could no longer stomach their smugness and sense of superiority. I needed to look for something that would allow me to be my own boss.



## My Trio at Chantecler



■ Me as a drummer, 1947.

By now I was already pretty good on the drums and teamed up with a bass player and a pianist (whose names regrettably I cannot recall) and formed a trio. We rehearsed constantly until we felt ready to perform in front of an audience.

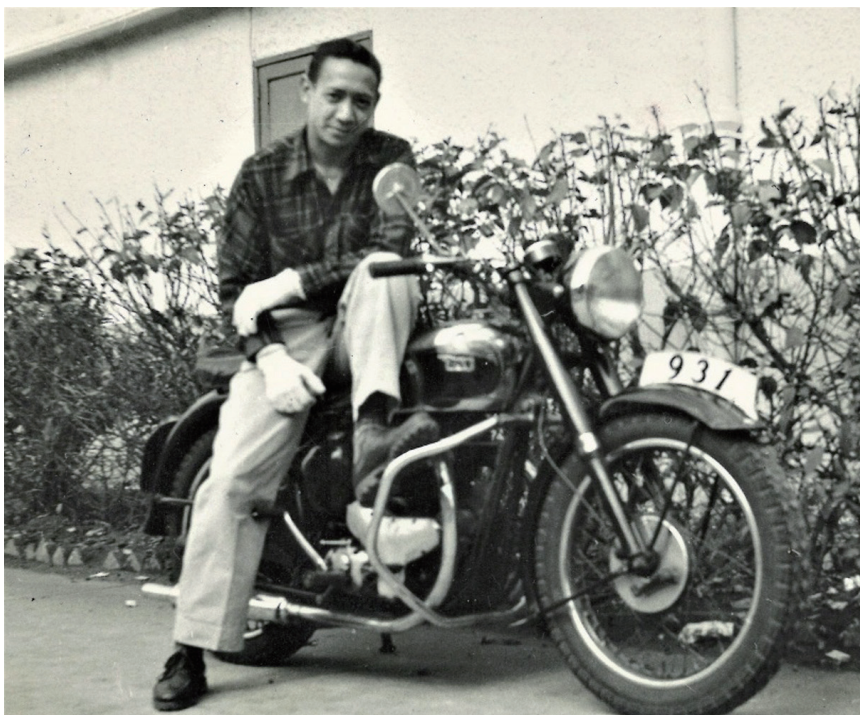
It was 1947. A Russian bakery in Kowloon, Chantecler Bakery and Restaurant, on the corner of Nathan Road and Hillwood Road, served lunchtime trade but was shut in the evenings. Inspiration struck straight away. I approached the owner and asked him if he had ever considered converting the bakery into a dining club after hours with



a small band for entertainment. He was very taken with the idea, revealing that Chantecler had briefly operated as such in the late 1930s, before the war, and he recognised the potential in starting up again. As a consequence we secured a gig for ourselves at Chantecler, where we gradually made quite a name.

Customers paid an entrance fee and were additionally charged for food and wine. The clientele were mostly white-collar workers who loved socialising, music and dance. As band leader, I would survey the patrons before going onstage in order to determine our set. We would normally start the evening with a waltz if the diners were more mature. With a younger audience, we played swing music, such as Glenn Miller's then very popular 'Little Brown Jug', to liven the tempo. People would rush to the dance floor with their partners to get 'in the groove'. During the intermission they would gratefully buy us drinks. In 1948, our piano player left and was replaced by my brother, Armando, on saxophone.

It was a hectic time for me as I still kept my day job at the bank, appearing at Chantecler at night where I worked hard to establish my name in the local music scene. After the show I would take the Star Ferry back home, or if I missed the last departure I hopped on a wallawalla, a small motorised boat thus named by Europeans for its very noisy engine, which crossed back and forth between Hong Kong Island and the Kowloon Peninsula before the Cross Harbour Tunnel was built in 1970. By 1948, however, I was doing well enough at HSBC and Chantecler to be able to buy myself a motorcycle. After the hardship and deprivation of the war years, the freedom it offered was liberating. I could use the motorbike to get to work at the bank, and if I needed to cross the harbour on the vehicular ferry there was no need to queue up behind a long line of cars!



■ I become the proud owner of a motorcycle, 1948.

With bands in huge demand, we played at a lot of popular venues, apart from Chantecler, including the Ladies' Recreation Club, Club de Recreio, the Indian Recreation Club, Club Filipino, Club Lusitano, the Hong Kong Cricket Club, the Hong Kong Club and the Hong Kong Country Club.

We reduced our performing schedule and quit playing at Chantecler altogether when I joined Rediffusion in 1949. Being a disc jockey there raised my profile, and in the 1950s the trio disbanded. I then teamed up with the Vieira brothers to form a new group, which I named Ray Cordeiro and The Telstars. Our popularity as a dance band soon grew and we were constantly asked to perform at private clubs and nightclubs all over the colony.

We were engaged regularly at the Hong Kong Country Club in Deep Water Bay and I clearly remember one incident at a New Year celebration at the Club in the 1970s. Returning from a break, our band couldn't get the amplifier and speakers to work. We rechecked the sound equipment and finally discovered that the power had been disconnected by the Club's inebriated manager. I was incensed and ready to storm out. The Country Club's chairman tossed the manager in a locked room and pleaded with us to continue. It was New Year's Eve and everyone had been having a good time, so we agreed and resumed our performance.

I loved playing with a band, and typically earning a few hundred dollars a performance was the icing on the cake.

I was now, officially, a professional musician.



Ray Cordeiro and the Telstars perform at the Ladies' Recreation Club, 1958.





Having fun at the Country Club, 1959.

4 HONG KONG MUSIC-MAKER

## HONG KONG STARS APPEARING IN MACAU'S "FESTIVAL OF MUSIC"

**BIG CHARITY SHOW TAKES PLACE AT THE CHENG PENG THEATRE**

YESTERDAY, Saturday, some of Hong Kong's best known showbusiness personalities left the Colon for Macau to perform in the "Festival of Music" show taking place today at 5.00 p.m. at the Cheng Peng Theatre.

Proceeds from the show, which is expected to draw a full house, will go to a very worthy cause—Escola Commercial.

Headlining the show are Ray Cordeiro and his Telstars who have been playing regularly at the Hong Kong Country Club, Deep Water Bay. Ray Cordeiro needs little introduction to readers of the Music Maker. A well known and respected musician and drummer of many years standing, Ray is also one of Hong Kong's most popular disc-jockeys presenting a variety of popular music programmes over Radio Hong Kong.

At a similar charity concert held last year at the Cheng Peng Theatre, Ray led the Satellites, this year he takes his Telstars comprising Danny Vieira, lead guitar, Fernando Vieira, rhythm guitar, Alex Vieira, bass guitarist, Ignatius Rosa, rhythm and percussion and lead singer Eric Fox.



Miss Pricella



Ray Cordeiro and his Telstars who play regularly at the Country Club, Deep Water Bay, will be performing in the "Festival of Music" in Macau today.

**PEPE'S**

**A Master of Latin**

**CURRENTLY in Hong**

**darin Hotel is the well known**

For many years now Pepe in Mexico, the United States himself a reputation as a m

Formerly a banker with British mining company, (his parents never approved of career in music even though young Pepe had studied piano and music at the Conservatory in Mexico City). One day while on vacation in Mexico City he popped into the bar of the Rit Hotel.

Finding no-one at the piano he began playing, and the manager so impressed by Pepe,

I and my band take part in Macau's Festival of Music charity show, 16 May 1965.

‘Ray is a wonderful disc jockey who has navigated his way through different generations of the broadcasting industry. His voice is magnetic and glamorous. From vinyl records to cassette tapes, compact discs to the internet era, he has spent the past 71 years (and still counting!) promoting the best the world of music has to offer to an appreciative audience. Ray’s spirit and achievements set him up as a fine role model. He is the pride of the Hong Kong music scene, a legend in the music world.’

*Rebecca Pan*

Former Singer and Actor

‘Uncle Ray is Hong Kong’s most loved and respected radio icon, who brings back good memories with his loving and soothing voice, complementing the music he plays each night.’

*Robert Chua*

Founder of *Enjoy Yourself Tonight*

## CHAPTER THREE

# LEARNING THE ROPES AT REDIFFUSION

**I**MARKED my 70th anniversary in broadcasting in 2019, a milestone that owed much to a single job interview.

Until 1949, RHK had been the only radio station in Hong Kong. In that year, Rediffusion went on air in the colony, breaking the monopoly with an alternative cable radio service. It was a significant year in other respects. The People's Republic of China was founded, and my life would be irrevocably changed.

In early 1949, a few months after returning to Hong Kong from Shanghai, my brother, Armando, joined Rediffusion as a scriptwriter. As luck would have it, there was another vacancy in the department.

'The station wants to recruit a second scriptwriter,' Armando said. 'Do you want to give it a try?'

I jumped at the chance. As construction of the Rediffusion headquarters on Hennessy Road was ongoing, I attended an interview at their temporary office in Taikoo Dockyard where I met Frank Harris, the managing director.

When I first arrived at the office Harris wasn't there. Armando greeted me and told me to go and get cleaned up while I waited. I was soaking with sweat – from a combination of nervousness and a long walk. My brother also told me to stop worrying and said Harris was very friendly.

When Frank Harris did return to the dockyard office, he welcomed me warmly, his genial American accent immediately lessening my unease.

‘Do you have any experience in broadcasting?’ he asked.

‘No, sir,’ was my reply. ‘No radio experience at all.’

‘Then why do you want to work here?’

‘Because I like music. In fact, I love music,’ I said.

‘Good,’ replied Harris. ‘Can you start on Monday?’

The answer was emphatically yes, but as money was a vital consideration I asked Mr. Harris how much he was going to pay me.

‘Seven hundred,’ he replied. Then, misreading my stunned reaction, he added, ‘Not enough?’

I couldn’t have blurted out my response any faster. ‘Yes, enough. And I start work next Monday?’

Seven hundred dollars! It was three times my salary at HSBC.

To this day I shake my head in disbelief that getting that job was as straightforward as a five-minute interview. I saw it as a blessing from God, even when people subsequently told me that Frank happened to be good at reading people. Presumably I had created a positive impression.

There is a well-known story that went around Rediffusion involving Frank Harris and a veteran Chinese broadcaster named Li Ngao (tonally identical to ‘you’ and ‘me’ when pronounced in Cantonese). Frank was very aggressive in recruiting talent for the launch of Rediffusion. He discovered most streets over in Guangzhou were quiet in the afternoon, apparently because people there would stay indoors to listen to this one man, Li Ngao, on the wireless. Frank was suitably impressed. He tried to hire Li but was turned down. Frank upped the ante, arranging round-trip helicopter rides and inviting Li to the renowned Ying King Restaurant on Johnston Road to explore

the possibility of working with Rediffusion. Again, Frank's advances were rebuffed. His persistence finally wore Li down at the third time of asking with a salary package too good to refuse.

Li Ngao was a household name in broadcasting. In contrast, I was a nobody, nonetheless hired by the same man on nothing more than a gut feeling.

I started as a scriptwriter with the Blue Channel (English service) without having the faintest idea as to what I was meant to be doing. Back then, anyone hosting a programme wasn't normally permitted to just turn on the microphone and ad-lib. They had to stick to a script, and it was my job to write that script. In effect, a novice was telling disc jockeys and presenters what to say. Excited to be with a broadcasting station, I was quick to learn and took cues from professional transcription services. I also became intimately familiar with a thesaurus!



Disc jockeys in the early days at Rediffusion had to follow their scripts religiously, 1950s.



## CREATING MY OWN SHOWS

At Rediffusion, scriptwriters additionally had the role of programme producers. That granted us the opportunity to push out new content so long as we took responsibility for putting everything together. I set about creating a show that would showcase my kind of music: big band and jazz. My very first programme, *Progressive Jazz*, premiered in 1949.

Although the show was well received and had a high enough audience retention to keep it on air, I understood I still had a long way to go. Foremost, I needed to widen my listener base. With support from Rediffusion, I introduced my own first live show, *The Beginners Please*, in 1951.



■ The Rediffusion recording studio, 1950s.

### ***The Beginners Please and Matt Monro***

*The Beginners Please* was a weekly talent show sponsored by a foreign tobacco company for British soldiers stationed in Hong Kong. It was held on Saturday nights at the Cheero Club, the newly rebuilt Servicemen's Centre in Central where I met the late Matt Monro.

Matt, whose real name was Terence Edward Parsons, was as gifted a singer as they come. He was serving as a tank instructor and mechanic for the British Army in the colony. Matt trounced the competition with a seven-week winning streak, receiving a ten-dollar cash prize and a carton of cigarettes each time. He was unbeatable. I felt I had no choice but to ban him from further participation as the sponsor was worried the results would look fixed. Between us we eventually came up with a solution.

'Matt,' I said, 'we will offer you a 15-minute show at Rediffusion provided that you agree to stop participating in the competition.'

That's how *Terry Parsons Sings* debuted on Rediffusion in early 1952.

For Matt's first show it was a shock to see him turn up being led by two military guards. He looked a bit sheepish but then smiled and told us it was punishment for breaking curfew the night before. Matt was sentenced to one week in the brig but had dispensation to appear on Rediffusion under armed escort. A small price to pay for the stellar singing career that followed!

Rediffusion helped raise Matt's profile across Hong Kong, bringing him to the attention of my good friend Bing Rodriguez, a consummate musician and band leader. Bing invited Matt to be the lead singer of his quartet at the Star Hotel on Nathan Road. From there their popularity took them to the Ritz Ballroom in North Point, a venue large enough for 600 guests that claimed in its advertisements to be 'Hong Kong's gayest nightspot' (the first Miss Hong Kong Beauty

Pageant had been held at the same venue in 1946). To add its glamour it was located right on the waterfront.

Matt stayed with Bing's quartet until he returned home to England. At his farewell gathering in 1953, Matt revealed to me that while the army paid him just \$60 a week, he earned five times as much from performing. Lucrative for Matt, to be sure, but most important of all, he had fulfilled his ambition of becoming a professional singer.

Matt was on his way to superstar status. However, when he landed back in London in June 1953, he first had to take up a job as a bus driver.

'You know, I couldn't reach the brakes because my legs were too short. Each time I wanted to shift gear, I had to stand up!' he told me later.

Opportunity knocked when he was discovered by star honky-tonk pianist Winifred Atwell, who took him under her wing and helped him secure a recording contract with Decca Records using the stage name of Matt Monro. Atwell's 1945 hit 'Let's Have Another Party' was the first No.1 UK single by a woman instrumentalist, and the first by a black artist.

Matt had been gone from Hong Kong for almost nine years, when at RHK in 1962 we discussed the upcoming Operation Santa Claus charity drive. In the meeting, Director of Broadcasting Donald Brooks said he wanted to invite an international star for the event. Matt was our unanimous first choice.

Aware of my rapport with Matt, Donald said, 'Can you contact Matt and ask if he is willing to return to Hong Kong for Operation Santa Claus?'

To my surprise, Matt was thrilled that I had got in touch and agreed without hesitation. Ted Thomas, the producer of the charity drive, finalised the details with Matt in a follow-up call. Matt flew into Hong Kong on 17 December 1962. After the press conference at Maxim's restaurant in Central, Bing and I were invited back

to Matt's hotel room at the Ambassador Hotel on Nathan Road. When Bing remarked that he loved the new dress shirts Matt was unpacking from his suitcase, Matt generously invited him to take whatever he fancied. Bing politely declined. Matt then treated us to dinner at Jimmy's Kitchen, a local dining institution that sadly closed its doors for the last time in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, though management maintain the hope of a reopening at a later date.

On the night of his concert for Operation Santa Claus, Matt duetted with celebrated local artist Mona Fong on 'When the Saints Go Marching In', and they brought the house down. Matt was given the only recording of the show as a souvenir. The performance wasn't heard again until Matt's daughter, Michele, found the recording and released it in 2015.

When in 1964 I completed my British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) training course in London, I went to see Matt at the BBC studios. He was in rehearsal and I asked the guard to inform him that 'Ray Cordeiro from Hong Kong is here'. Within a couple of minutes, Matt came bounding down the stairs and embraced me like a long-lost brother. Matt treasured my friendship, as I did his. He would always make time for me whenever he was in town. In 1969, after interviewing Matt at RHK, we flew to Manila in the Philippines for the next leg of his concert tour.

Matt was dubbed 'The Man with the Golden Voice'. Frank Sinatra considered Matt to be the best male singer in Britain. People probably cite 'Portrait of My Love', 'My Kind of Girl' and 'Walk Away' as their best-loved Matt songs. But he was a tour de force on the jazzier 'I Get Along Without You Very Well', 'Maria' and 'I've Got You Under My Skin'. The emotional resonance that carries through his voice is of the

highest calibre. I am so proud that I was part of Matt's music journey, all the way back to his first appearance on *The Beginners Please*, and glad for all the times we had in each other's company.



■ Me and Matt Monroe, 1962.

### ***Rumpus Time* and *The Fabulous Echoes***

My second live studio production, *Rumpus Time*, was introduced in the late 1950s. Ron Ross was the disc jockey. Many stellar performers graced the show, Mona Fong among them; but without doubt the most synonymous were the Fabulous Echoes, who morphed into Society of Seven, also known as SOS, when they moved to Honolulu and held a decades-long residency as a showband and entertainment act at the Outrigger Waikiki hotel.

The Fabulous Echoes were a Filipino pop band originally made up of Cliff Foenander (lead vocal), Tony Ruivivar Jr. (guitar), Stan Robinson (bass), Danny Ruivivar (drums) and Bert Sagum (tambourine and vocals) and calling themselves The Blue Echoes. I remember the first

time I laid eyes on them, five scruffy young boys who hardly inspired confidence. Looks can be deceiving, though – they were brilliant. Later, Terry Lucido joined them and it wasn't long before they became the main attraction on *Rumpus Time*.

When Diamond Music Limited switched from selling imported vinyl to a local recording company in the late 1950s, I introduced the Fabulous Echoes to Ren da Silva, the founder of the company. He was so impressed he practically signed them up on the spot.

The Fabulous Echoes were one of the first handful of recording pop groups in Hong Kong. Their debut song 'A Little Bit of Soap' topped my *Popularity Poll* for 32 weeks. Listeners still love to request it on my programme today. I consider the Fabulous Echoes to be one of the most outstanding pop bands in Hong Kong history.

Tony Ruivivar Jr. remained the leader of the group, alongside Bert Sagum, the comedian, dancer and jack-of-all-trades. They had very fond memories of Hong Kong. Every time I visited Honolulu and caught the SOS show, they would pause during the performance at some stage to introduce their special guests. I was presented as 'Dick Clark of Hong Kong' and acknowledged applause from the audience with an appreciative bow.

### ***Diamond Music Show and Shriro Hit Parade***

One day, the director of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation, Lance Tschannen, visited Rediffusion. My boss, Roy Dunlop, tasked me with looking after him. We completed a tour around the station and then I interviewed him on my programme during which, to my utter euphoria, he revealed he had rubbed shoulders with jazz legends such as Duke Ellington, Oscar Peterson and Count Basie. Afterwards, I took him to Blue Heaven for dinner, a popular jazz club in Central where

Bing Rodriguez and his quartet performed. Tschannen was impressed and before he left the colony, he spoke to Roy saying, ‘You have a very talented young man at your station. He deserves a higher profile.’

Roy called me into his office and relayed what Tschannen had said. ‘Do you want to take on more responsibility?’ he asked.

‘I’d really like to introduce more music programmes,’ I replied.

In exchange for me agreeing to draft and announce promotional messages on air, the station secured sponsorship from Diamond Music Limited and Shriro Company (an electrical appliance dealer), and I started two weekly shows: the *Diamond Music Show* and *Shriro Hit Parade*, on Wednesday and Saturday nights, respectively. I was on my way to becoming a prominent disc jockey in Hong Kong.

The *Diamond Music Show* was an instant success. The audience loved that it offered the latest hits like Patti Page and her ‘Tennessee Waltz’ and Johnny Nash with ‘The Voice of Love’. A feature of *Shriro Hit Parade* was the top ten requests, tallied from listeners’ mail. This segment undoubtedly contributed to the show’s ratings.



Rediffusion’s seventh anniversary ball. From right: Ren da Silva, founder of Diamond Music, Roy Dunlop, Head of Blue Channel, Rediffusion, and his wife, Gerald D’Almada and Gian Carlo, bandleader of a popular Italian group in Hong Kong (and a regular on Rumpus Time), 1956.



### ***Talent Time***

*Talent Time* was a singing contest jointly organised by the radio and television arms of Rediffusion in the late 1950s. It was notable for being the first ever such contest presented by a TV station in Hong Kong. The preliminary rounds were hosted and broadcast on *Rumpus Time*; the final was a live television affair (*Talent Time*). Marilyn Palmer won the contest with ‘Kiss Me, Honey Honey, Kiss Me’, and was named ‘Shirley Bassey of the colony’ by the locals. Tony Myatt was the runner up and Chico Rosa Pereira came third. Both Marilyn and Tony secured recording contracts with Diamond Music Limited after the competition.



*Rumpus Time* and *Talent Time* family. Front row: The Fabulous Echoes; middle row: Ron Ross (DJ of the *Rumpus Time* show), far left, me, far right; back row: Marilyn Palmer (winner of *Talent Time*), fifth from left, Tony Myatt (runner-up), seventh from left, late 1950s.

### **FELLOW DISC JOCKEYS**

Rediffusion had a stable of talented disc jockeys. The best of the lot was John Wallace. He was the only one among us who could carry a



show irrespective of the material, from football to a royal visit. There was only one problem: John enjoyed his alcohol and had a tendency to show up late for his breakfast programme. If he didn't arrive 15 minutes ahead of airtime, the station would ask the little door boy, Mickey, to rush over to John's residence on the other side of the road to scramble him out of bed.

Gerald D'Almada joined the Rediffusion ranks in 1950 as a balance and control engineer. He was a close follower of the music scene and spun discs for John Wallace at the station. One time, John failed to appear at all. The situation was desperate. Gordon Bradley, who was the voice of the station's daily financial report, asked Gerald to take over. Gerald was spinning discs anyway and best suited of those on the premises to the task at hand. He had zero experience in front of a microphone and was a bundle of nerves, but with Gordon's encouragement he pulled through. Afterwards, he was a complete wreck. Little did he know it was his big break as a disc jockey and



█ Gerald and me socialising with a guest at Rediffusion's seventh anniversary ball, 1956.

singer. When Rediffusion began television operations in 1957, Gerald excelled again, starring in a late-night show as both presenter and singer (in Frank Sinatra's style with Eddie Costa on the piano). His cheerful demeanour made him a perfect fit for the TV show.

Later on, Tony Myatt came to work at Rediffusion. I'm a close friend of Tony and his family, who originally hail from Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), and knew him to have a great love for music. In the beginning, he worked in the station's financial newsroom, of all places. Becoming a member of the *Rumpus Time* team as my understudy was much more his speed. From guest performing on the show to finishing runner-up on *Talent Time*, Tony had a spell as a recording artist and subsequently landed at Commercial Radio as a disc jockey. He married Marlini, also from Ceylon, and left Hong Kong to settle back in Britain. He would find fame as presenter of the late show on London's Capital Radio and worked at several other stations including the BBC and Jazz FM.

Then there was sweet Norma Stevens, a presenter of teenage programmes who later married the station producer Ernst Thomson. Also in the office, sitting opposite me, was a very bright and talented teenager Betty Souza, whose idea of self-improvement was to learn a new word every day.

One afternoon, she turned to me and said, 'Today's word is "gregarious", because I am a gregarious person.' We live and learn.

## **THE RISE AND FALL OF REDIFFUSION**

Following Rediffusion's radio launch in 1949, the number of subscribers grew from fewer than 100 to 100,000 at its peak.

A big fire broke out in the Rediffusion office at 10 a.m. on 8 December 1954. This was, inauspiciously, 13 years to the day since the

Japanese invasion. Luckily, I wasn't there that morning. I was told that all the equipment and documents had been destroyed, but they were able to recover the records that we used for our daily programme. Surprisingly, Rediffusion resumed services within a couple of hours after an emergency meeting with the government. They allowed us to use the basement of the Peddar Street Post Office, which the British had commandeered for a temporary communications office in the Second World War.

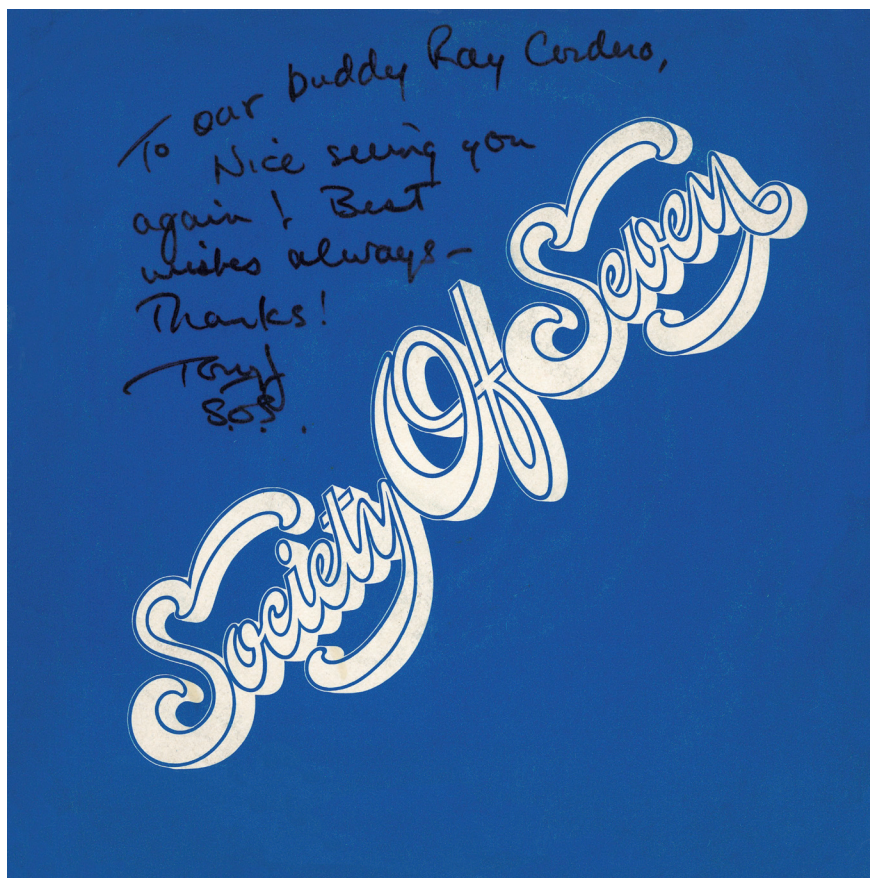
The fire wasn't disastrous, but a new rival marked the beginning of Rediffusion's end. Rediffusion was a cable-connected radio service that required a monthly subscription and its coverage was also limited. In 1959, the Hong Kong government opened up local airwaves with a free radio station, Commercial Radio. It didn't take long for Rediffusion to understand they were fighting a losing battle. Not only was their top talent being systematically poached, listeners also defected in increasing numbers, enticed by a free, territory-wide radio service provider. Rediffusion ceased operations on 30 September 1973 upon the expiration of the 25-year broadcasting contract with the government.

I met Mr. George Ho, owner of Commercial Radio, at a function in the late 1960s. We had been chatting amiably when he said, 'Ray, the only regret of my radio business is that you are not working with me.'

It was really flattering to be recognised by a local radio mogul. Looking back, it's just as well George didn't get his man because I would have fallen by the wayside when Commercial Radio later decided on a radical scale-down of their English radio division.

I worked at Rediffusion until 1960. My last programme with the station was *Swing and Sway with Ray*.

## Memorabilia from the Fabulous Echoes



■ The Fabulous Echoes, now the Society of Seven, gifted me this single in 1983.

‘Uncle Ray is a legend in the Hong Kong music scene. He is also the first person who admired the potential of Teddy Robin and The Playboys. Apart from opening doors for our career, Uncle has given us unending support and motivation. From mentor to friend down the years, thank you, Uncle, from the bottom of my heart.’

*Teddy Robin*

Singer, Actor and Film Director

‘Wishing our Uncle Ray good health and eternal happiness.’

*William Kwan*

Bassist of The Playboys

‘Uncle Ray, you are a legend in the Hong Kong pop music development history.

You are my mentor and friend. I will never forget your kindness and support.’

*Raymond Kwan*

Rhythm Guitarist of The Playboys

## CHAPTER FOUR

# RADIO HONG KONG

**C**HANGE IS CONSTANT. Some people move house, others choose to emigrate. There are those who switch jobs, or even partners. We broaden our horizons and seek out new adventures – adapting but always moving forward. So, if someone does the same job day in, day out for more than 70 years and has no intention to retire or do anything else, would you consider it unambitious? Lunacy?

I have been a disc jockey since joining Rediffusion in 1949. I'm still on air from 10 p.m. to 1 a.m., Monday through Friday. I believe I have the best job, so why change? And I'm crazy about music. Perhaps I'm a 'lunatic', after all.

However, following eleven wonderful years with Rediffusion, it was time to take the next step in what I now confidently began to see as a career. I saw an ad posted in the *South China Morning Post (SCMP)* in 1960 for a Light Music Producer with RHK. It was right up my alley. First, I enjoyed light music. Second, I could target a greater number of listeners thanks to RHK's comprehensive network coverage. Last but not least, being a civil servant came with job stability and a pension – the proverbial 'iron rice bowl' in Chinese jargon.

I submitted my credentials, sat for an exam with 14 other hopefuls (mostly army wives) and in the final stage was given a voice test by Pat Penn, a female producer at RHK responsible for vetting potential

candidates. As the only applicant with solid broadcasting experience, I felt confident. It also didn't hurt my chances that I was friendly with the higher-ups including Donald Brooks, Director of Broadcasting, Tim Birch, Head of the English Service, and Ted Thomas, Senior Producer. I got the job.

What I didn't know at the time of my appointment was that I had been earmarked to supervise Hong Kong's 'Grand Old Lady of Broadcasting', Aileen Woods. Aileen was 73 and an MBE (Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) recipient. She was very popular with her show *Down Memory Lane*, playing old favourites from the thirties and forties in her own inimitable style. She had continued working as a freelancer with the station after retirement and didn't take kindly to answering to a new and much younger boss. Moreover, Aileen famously possessed a 'black book' that contained a comprehensive list and exact whereabouts of all the important records, without which one would struggle to locate them from within a poorly catalogued music library. Her unwillingness to share the book's contents meant I had to generate my own index from scratch.

The fact that I authorised Aileen's pay cheque probably played a part in the gradual softening of her stance. She finally came to understand that I had no ulterior motive and wasn't the enemy. She stopped being defensive and opened up, revealing a warm personality. Our friendship grew from there. Aileen told me she loved cats and was fostering nine of them. Sure enough, when I was invited to dinner at her home, the front door opened and all nine cats ran to her like the most loyal companions. Each one was identified by name. Amazing!

Radio Hong Kong's office in Mercury House on Connaught Road Central occupied four floors of a building overlooking City Hall that



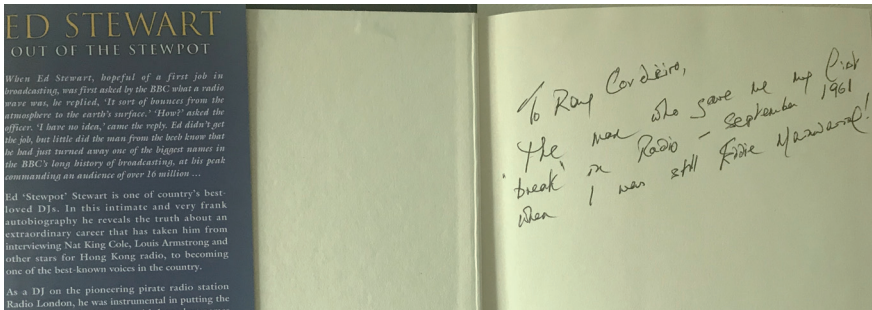
belonged to Cable and Wireless Limited. Despite the number of floors, space was at a premium. I shared a tiny, cramped room with Irene Yuen, a classical music producer, with just a single pillar separating our desks. Both of us had headphones on most of the time to ensure the music we were compiling for our respective shows didn't drown the other's out. The real benefit of such a practice was it provided respite from the constant racket of people using our room as if it were a thoroughfare. Dealing with the surrounding chaos was challenging, but I willingly embraced what was oftentimes a fun and harmonious work environment. Things were no different when Clive Simpson replaced Irene as my co-worker as producer of serious music. Clive, in later years, went on to found Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK)'s Radio 4. Moving to the spacious surroundings of Broadcasting House in Broadcast Drive in 1969 couldn't have been a greater contrast. I had a small private office but found myself a little isolated from the hive of activity of the central work area.

## **LAUNCHING NEW DISC JOCKEYS**

One of my job responsibilities at RHK was to take on potential disc jockeys to help expand the station's programmes.

Soon after I started with the station, I auditioned a Canadian disc jockey by the name of Nick Kendall. He was hired on the strength of his voice and became one of the best disc jockeys in the colony. Nick was one of those live-for-the-moment, happy-go-lucky characters who would spend every cent in his pocket. One Saturday evening, he threw a party in his backyard and ordered crates of soft drinks and beer. When they were delivered, he didn't have the money to pay the bill, so we all chipped in. After all, no one wanted a dry party.

Another RHK personality I helped to give a start to was Eddie Mainwaring, a station announcer, film critic and rugby commentator, and occasional double bass player. I subsequently recommended him to my brother, Armando, at Rediffusion, who cast him on the *Forces Request Show*, where he shone. In later years, Eddie became a household name as Ed Stewart with the BBC in England and one of the best-known voices in the country. He kindly singled me out for launching his career as a disc jockey in his autobiography *Out of the Stewpot*, published in 2005.



■ Signed copy of Ed Stewart's book.

In the 1970s, there was the fiery-tempered Andrew Bull. Like Ed, Andrew was a newsreader for RHK. I thought he had the credentials to be a disc jockey and offered him a job. In a short space of time Andrew became the station's livewire. After departing RHK, Andrew was heavily involved in promoting the local disco scene, starting up famous venues such as Disco Disco in Central and Canton Disco in Harbour City.

It wasn't RHK's practice to announce newsreaders at the time. I believed in being respectful, hence I was the only broadcaster who would introduce their names. That was how, in part, I discovered Eddie's and Andrew's potential and gave them the opportunity to become disc jockeys.

## **I MEET THE BEATLES!**

In 1964 I was given the opportunity, as mentioned earlier, to attend a three-month training programme at the BBC in London. Courses covered the proper use of the microphone, how to conduct an interview and studio operations. Only the last imparted any really useful knowledge throughout my career.

When the training programme ended, I had two weeks to kill. I headed to EMI in London with a letter of introduction from Robert Ascott of EMI's Hong Kong office, who knew I quite enjoyed interviewing pop stars who passed through Hong Kong. Had I chosen to spend my free time travelling around Europe instead, this book probably would never have got written.

I met with Stan Stern, manager of the Record Division.

'What can I do for you?' he asked

'I would like to interview some pop artists,' I replied.

'Which ones?'

'The Beatles are at the top of my list,' I said.

He picked up the phone and called Brian Epstein, the Beatles' manager.

'Brian, there's a young disc jockey from Hong Kong who would like to interview the Beatles.'

Brian said, 'Fine, we have a press conference for them tomorrow morning. Why don't you send this young man up to NEMS Enterprises?'

This was Epstein's management company, the Beatles' headquarters.

Stan put down the phone. 'There you are. You can interview the Beatles tomorrow.'

'I don't have a recorder. I've got pen and paper only,' I replied.

Stan said, 'Don't worry, I'll lend you a reel-to-reel recorder together with tape.'

I couldn't believe that with just one brief phone call everything was arranged. I learnt a valuable lesson on how to make things happen: know the right people and make the right connections at the right moment. It was considerate of Stan to then invite me to dinner where I met Rebecca Pan, the first artist from Hong Kong signed to EMI Music (UK) Ltd. She was in discussion about a western marketing campaign to be called 'A China Doll', which unfortunately never got off the ground due to bad timing when everything in the sixties was about the Beatles.



Dinner with Stan and Marjorie Stern of EMI London; Rebecca Pan on my right. The May Fair Hotel, Beachcomber bar, London, June 1964.

### **Interview of a Career**

Early next morning, I headed to NEMS Enterprises for the press conference carrying the borrowed recorder. On my way I picked up a copy of *The Best of The Beatles* from *Fabulous*, with the Beatles on the

magazine's cover. I couldn't contain my excitement. Was this really happening? Was I actually about to interview the most famous pop band in the world? Who in my line of work wouldn't have given their right arm for this opportunity in 1964?

When I arrived, Paul McCartney was standing at the door. He noticed the magazine under my arm and asked about it. I told him it was a special issue featuring his band, handed it over and requested he sign it at the same time. Paul was happy to oblige and autographed not just one but every single page that he appeared on. After Paul, I met John Lennon. Seeing what Paul had done, he followed suit, as did George Harrison and Ringo Starr. I now had 32 signatures! Nicely warmed up, I switched on my recorder and kicked off the Beatles' interview with Ringo. The whole interview lasted for almost nine minutes.

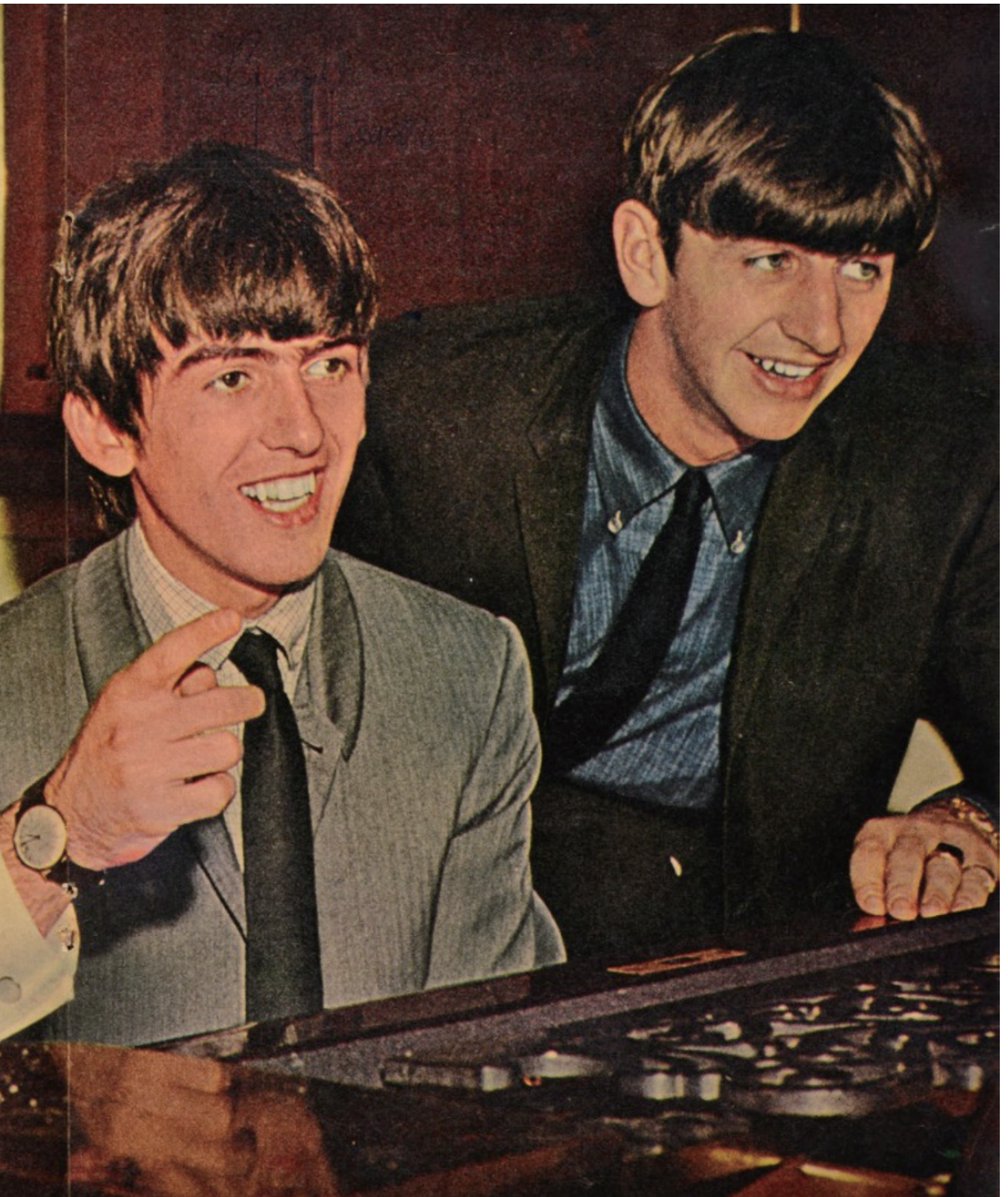


My 8-minute-50-second Beatles' interview tape, June 1964.





My autograph collection: The Beatles. Page from the *The Best of The Beatles* from *Fabulous*, 1964.





## THE FAB FOUR REEL

### Ringo Starr

RINGO            I heard it's [Hong Kong] a swinging town, or city, or place.

ME                Well, it is as far as pop music is concerned.

RINGO            It's wild, I believe, there.

ME                Yes, you see we have an advantage because we have all the latest hits from the States as well as from England. And, of course, you have a terrific following right in Hong Kong.

RINGO            Oh good.

ME                What about your trip to America? Can you tell us something about it?

RINGO            Uh, the last one? Well, all of it was marvellous and we all loved it... 'cos we loved the States anyway, you know. New York is such a great city as well.

ME                You didn't expect such fan hysteria.

RINGO            No, we didn't expect anything like that.

ME                Are you going back to the States again?

RINGO            Yes, in the middle of August to the middle of September we go back to the States. It's a month roughly; it's the last two weeks of August and the first in September.

ME                Ringo, I believe you were the last to join The Beatles. How did that come about?

RINGO            Well, I've known the boys for four years. You know, we met in Germany and then Liverpool... and when I was with another group, and the drummer they had got sick, they'd just asked me to play. You know, I used to play with them on my own. And then I was playing... in a

holiday camp and Brian phoned me saying, 'Would you like to join?' And I said, 'Yeah'. And I joined, and that was it.

ME That was long before the first recording?

RINGO No, that was when... no, that was just before we made the first record. It was two years in August and we made the record in October. [Referring to the Beatles' first single – 'Love Me Do', recorded on 5 October 1962.]

ME And I, uh, believe you are learning one other instrument besides playing the drums?

RINGO The organ or guitar? I've got one of each.

ME One of each of them!

RINGO Yeah, well, I went a bit potty on the guitar, so I bought, well, you know... and I got a guitar. And then, uh, I've gone a bit potty on organs now, so I've bought a big organ. Our flat looks like a mad man's music something... because we've got two guitars, an organ, a big conga drum and maracas, and god knows what there.

ME So, how are you getting along with all these other instruments?

RINGO [laughing] Well, there's too many now, I can't play any of them. Just a few chords on each.

ME Do you have any ambition in life now that you've made the top?

RINGO No, nothing special. We just keep going. You know, none of them worrying what'll happen tomorrow. Just keep going.

ME Finally, Ringo, before I go off to Paul, do you have a message for your many fans in Hong Kong?

RINGO Well, I can't wait to come over there and see you all. And keep swinging, and that's about it, then, isn't it?

ME Well, the best of luck to you, Ringo, and hope to see you again.

RINGO Thank you very much, Ray.

### **Paul McCartney**

PAUL Hello, ladies and gentlemen in Hong Kong.

ME What about the boys and girls?

PAUL Oh! Well, that's... boys and girls, ladies and gentlemen.

ME Well, I can sit here all day and tell you about Hong Kong, but I'd like to hear more from you. Have you heard of Hong Kong?

PAUL I heard of it but I'm very bad at geography, you see. So, um, I reckon it's in China, isn't it?

ME It's just on the shores of China, really... current British colony. It's a—

PAUL Oh good, oh good! Yeah... actually, the funny thing was we got some magazines from Hong Kong [and] we were reading them. The only thing is, you've to read 'em backwards, haven't you?

ME Well, if you are reading Chinese characters, maybe.

PAUL They were in Chinese characters.

ME Oh...

PAUL And the ones I read... had to read them backwards.

OTHERS [chiming in] We thought we were on the back cover [of the magazine], but in fact it was the front of it.

ME How did this first film of yours go? [The first movie of the Beatles – *A Hard Day's Night*.]

- PAUL Well, I think it went quite well, but I am not saying anything until people see it. You know, I'll just wait and see what other people think, 'cos I can't tell really what it's like.
- ME How do you feel as an actor for the first time?
- PAUL I don't feel like an actor, that's the thing.
- ME Just act natural I suppose...
- PAUL That's apparently... that's the hardest thing to do, act naturally, because you feel very self-conscious when the cameras are on. But I enjoyed doing it. It was good fun doing it. Marvellous!
- ME Have you composed any new tunes along with John yet?
- PAUL Yes... you mean recently?
- ME Yes.
- PAUL Yes, we have done about six recently.

### **John Lennon**

- ME Well, over to you now, John. How do you feel being at the top of the world?
- JOHN It's marvellous... the greatest thing... love it.
- ME Have you heard of Hong Kong?
- JOHN Sure, [we've] heard of it, yeah. Everyone's heard of it.
- ME Are you looking forward to coming over to Hong Kong?
- JOHN Yeah, a lot of people we know [have] been there. Helen Shapiro... and she told us...
- ME Shirley Bassey...
- JOHN Yeah, and somebody else... let me think... said the audiences are wild and they are very excited.
- ME I must let you know now you have a terrific following in Hong Kong, and they are all looking forward to you.

- JOHN            Good, good.
- ME                I understand you have a book out, published this year.
- JOHN            Oh, yeah.
- ME                How is it doing?
- JOHN            It's doing very well, better than I expected. I thought people would be interested, because it is one of The Beatles, but it's gone past that, you know...
- ME:                Is it doing better than your records?
- JOHN            Oh no, obviously, it doesn't... records are a different thing. But for a book it's doing very well.
- ME                Tell me, John, I am not quite sure about this, do you have a leader in the group, or—?
- JOHN            Well, if anybody wants to... You know, I'm meant to be the leader, but I don't say 'let's do this, let's do that'. It was just in the early days I was the first one to start the group. So they named me the leader and that's the [reason]. But I never done [sic] anything, you know...
- ME                And I believe that you are one of the composers yourself?
- JOHN            Yeah, Paul and I compose most of the songs.
- ME                Do you have anybody else outside to help you, or...?
- JOHN            No, never. We don't know anybody else that writes like us...
- ME                That's the best way to coin in the cash, isn't it?
- JOHN            Yeah, it's the best way, but earlier on it was just because we wanted to sing our own songs, to be different.
- ME                What's your itinerary from London?
- JOHN            We go to Copenhagen and then to Holland... I'm not sure where, probably Amsterdam, and then to Hong

Kong for two days, then to Australia. And then I think we come back to England for the premiere of the film. And then I don't know what happens... I don't know what month it is then... I get lost.

ME Isn't it a nice feeling to have other artists recording the songs that you've composed?

JOHN Oh that's... we enjoy that a lot!

ME A great singer like Ella Fitzgerald...

JOHN Oh, [we were] very flattered when she did that, very.

ME Would you like to say something to your many fans in Hong Kong before I move on to George?

JOHN Yeah, well, we'd like to thank all of you who bought our records. And we hope you'll like us as much when you've seen us. You know, that we're not disappointing... hope that we sound alright when we get there.

ME I'm sure they won't be disappointed. They'll be very happy. Thank you very much, John.

JOHN Thank you. Bye-bye.

### **George Harrison**

ME George, how did you come to join the Beatles?

GEORGE Uh, yeah... well... I met Paul a long time ago, about... let's see... about eight or nine years ago at school I met Paul. And, uh, he met John through another friend at school, and so I met John through Paul.

ME Sounds very complicated.

GEORGE Yeah, and we had a... group a long time ago and, um, a lot of the people in the group left. This was when we were still at school and it just ended up with John, Paul

and me and we just carried on playing just for our own amusement.

ME Have you ever dreamt of reaching such heights?

GEORGE I didn't dream of anything. It's too risky.

ME George, of all the hits you've made, which is your particular favourite?

GEORGE Uh... I don't know. I like... I like each new one better, if you know what I mean. And usually I like the B-side better. I like... 'You Can't Do That'. I prefer that to 'Can't Buy Me Love'. And I like 'This Boy' better than 'I Wanna Hold Your Hand'... you know, all the other sides.

ME What is your personal opinion with all these popular groups coming up now? Is it a threat to your popularity?

GEORGE I don't think so, because... we did it first... and so it's no threat until something completely different comes along.

ME Do you think the beat music will stay here for long?

GEORGE Yeah, it can stay for years. People have been saying it's going... ever since it started they were saying calypso is taking over. You know, it's a lot of rubbish. Beat's here and it's gonna be here for years and years.

ME Would you like to say a few words to your Hong Kong fans?

GEORGE Yeah, we can't wait to come out... you know, with all these dresses with the splits up the side...

ME That's it...

GEORGE I've seen them on the pictures.

ME That's it. Thank you very much George.

GEORGE Thank you.



When I returned after the interview to Hong Kong House, where I was staying in London, students and other civil servants from Hong Kong were eager to learn about me meeting the Beatles and the interview I conducted with them. We had a wonderful evening covering all things on the Fab Four.

There was another Beatles' press conference in London, exclusive to foreign correspondents as part of their promotional tour of Japan, Hong Kong and Australia. In more casual surroundings second time round I got to be friendlier with them, and they wanted to know more about the British colony. I suggested they experience the famous night life of Wan Chai district; the bars along Lockhart Road would be ideal for a good time out.

My third face-to-face meeting with the Beatles was at the old Kai Tak Airport when they arrived for their historic show at the Princess Theatre in Tsim Sha Tsui, now the site of the Mira hotel. More than a thousand fans showed up to welcome their idols at the airport on 8 June 1964. I was able to acquire further sets of autographs from John, Paul and George on a second copy of *Fabulous* magazine I had brought back from London. Ringo, sadly, had to miss out on the trip to Hong Kong because of illness. His replacement was Jimmie Nicol, whom I didn't ask to sign the magazine because he wasn't an original member.

Unfortunately, the copy of *Fabulous* magazine signed by the Beatles back in London suffered damage over subsequent decades as a result of my negligence in storing it properly. Nevertheless, I was able to sell it at auction in 2008 through Christie's for a substantial sum of money. I had paid two shillings and sixpence for the issue in 1964. It represented one of my better investments! Had I looked after it correctly, it would have been worth even more. However, it had already, without a doubt, lived up to its name! The copy signed in Hong Kong is on loan to the

Hong Kong Museum of History. When the renovation of the museum is completed in 2022, this magazine will be included in the thematic exhibition of the local Portuguese community.

The final time I saw the Beatles was for their concert on 9 June 1964 at the Princess Theatre. Unbelievably, it was far from a sell-out. Younger fans couldn't afford the \$76.20 (Hong Kong) asking price for front-row tickets and the adults had yet to be swept up in Beatlemania to justify purchasing even the cheapest tickets, which at around \$20 represented a tenth of a working-class person's monthly salary. I remember Paul McCartney said onstage, 'I see so many fans dressed in khaki in the front rows.' They were British soldiers in their uniforms. The promoter gave away tickets for them to fill the empty seats.

## **INTERVIEWING OTHER POP BANDS IN LONDON**

Apart from the Beatles, I was fortunate to interview other famous bands of the sixties whilst in London. I was not yet 40 and it was a huge fillip to my career.

### **The Shadows**

The Shadows, with Hank Marvin's incredible guitar skills, were a rock group I liked a lot. I was at the BBC studios one day while they were listening to playback recordings. Afterwards, Hank invited me for a cup of coffee at the BBC canteen, where I conducted my first interview with the four-member instrumental band. They were Cliff Richard's backing band at the time (and were so for ten years), and together they dominated British popular music before the Beatles. They were the first UK backing band to become stars. I met them once more when they came to Hong Kong in 1967, and then again when they appeared

as the backing group for Cliff Richard and Olivia Newton John at Lee Theatre in 1972. Whenever listeners request their song 'Apache', I'm reminded of our meetings.



■ A signed photo of the Shadows, 1964



■ Interviewing Hank Marvin, lead guitarist of the Shadows, 1967.

## Manfred Mann

Manfred Mann were a British rock band named after their keyboardist and best known for their hits ‘Do Wah Diddy Diddy’ and ‘Pretty Flamingo’. I met them first in London and then at the five-star Hong Kong Hilton in Central almost a decade later. On the second occasion, as I walked into the hotel lobby a look of recognition seemed to flash across Manfred’s face.

‘Have we ever met before?’ he asked as I approached him.

‘Yes, how did you recognise me? We’ve only met once, in London in 1964,’ I replied.

‘I paint portraits and have a good memory for faces,’ said Manfred.

‘Oh, you must have spent all your time focusing on my face last time,’ I shot back.



■ With Manfred Mann in Hong Kong, early 1970s.

### **The Searchers**

The Searchers were another pop band adored by Hong Kong fans in the 1960s. In my opinion, they were second only to the Beatles in that decade. I loved their vibe. 'Love Potion No. 9', 'Needles and Pins' and 'Sweets for My Sweet' receive regular rotation on my radio shows. My first encounter with them took place also at the BBC in London in 1964. When they came to Hong Kong a few years later, they agreed to come for an interview at RHK. We had a wonderful discussion about 'Merseybeat'. I still remember the hoard of screaming teenagers when they saw their idols coming out from the station.



■ Meeting the Searchers in Hong Kong, late 1960s.

### **The Swinging Blue Jeans**

The Swinging Blue Jeans were also a 1960s Merseybeat band. They had evolved from skiffle and were probably best known for their hit singles 'Hippy Hippy Shake' and 'Good Golly Miss Molly'. I met them



while they were shooting the movie *Swinging UK*. When they learnt about my job in Hong Kong, they invited me to play a walk-on part in their picture because they needed a disc jockey for a particular scene. My first foray into film was completed in two takes. I never got to see it, though, assuming I even made it into the final cut.

### **MY NEW CHAPTER AT RHK**

The arrival of the Beatles in the 1960s had started the new trend called ‘Merseybeat’. It was synonymous with mop heads (people with thick, scruffy hair), and was the original sound of the British Invasion that swept America. At the same time, other pop groups like the Swinging Blue Jeans, the Rolling Stones, the Searchers, the Hollies, Eric Burdon and the Animals sprung up – not all from Merseyside. The solo artist field included Cliff Richard, Cilla Black, Petula Clark, Dusty Springfield, Helen Shapiro and many more.

I had a treasure trove of interviews from the UK’s biggest names with me when I returned to Hong Kong. Radio was the major source of daily entertainment in Hong Kong at that time and my shows were the perfect platform to capitalise on a fresh dynamic of first-hand interviews with major artists and their corresponding music. The response was overwhelming. Donald Brooks, my boss, was so taken aback by the public fervour that after he had convened an internal management meeting at RHK, I took over all pop music slots from Ted Thomas, Nick Kendall and John Wallace. The three of them were reassigned hosting duties for other programmes. I believe this development was the foundation of my success in the years to come. My portfolio of shows was increased, and the schedules reorganised to reflect my elevated status both at the station and in the Hong Kong music scene.



■ Broadcasting stardom, 1965.



■ With Donald Brooks, the first Director of Broadcasting in Hong Kong.



### ***Just for You***

*Just for You* aired every Wednesday from 4.30 to 5.30 p.m. Listeners loved the fact they could write or phone in to request their favourite songs. I received hundreds of letters weekly and read every single one. It was time consuming, but there was nothing to complain about. On the contrary, I was thrilled to connect with fans whilst having my popularity sustained at the same time. It was a similar situation with phone requests, all of which I responded to even after the show as I didn't want anyone to be left disappointed. I marked down the callers' names and did my best to play their request next time. In view of the increasing demand, an extra request show with an identical format, *From Me to You*, was introduced in 1966.

### ***Top of the Pops***

*Top of the Pops* was aimed at introducing the latest hits on the US *Billboard* chart to Hong Kong listeners. It was broadcast on Tuesdays and Saturdays, 4.30 to 5.30 p.m. Teenagers, in particular, loved this show, such was their insatiable appetite for new music content. The programme was launched as a nod to the successful BBC television music chart show of the same name, which was first broadcast in January 1964 and ran until July 2006. The Saturday time slot later gave way to *From Me to You*.

### ***From Me to You***

Replacing the Saturday *Top of the Pops* time slot, *From Me to You* was another hour-long request programme. It was suspended by the station once in late 1967 because too many listeners used fake names for song requests. The outcry and subsequent calling for the resumption of the show eventually forced Ted Thomas to relent

and the show returned on 17 February 1968, albeit with a shortened airtime of 45 minutes. Only birthday, get-well or farewell dedications were accepted from then on.

### ***Popularity Poll***

*Popularity Poll* went out every Friday afternoon between 4.30 and 5.30 p.m., featuring the top 20 hits of the week as voted by listeners. One lucky winner who picked the top three hits in correct order was chosen and invited to the station to claim a \$30 cash prize. On one occasion, a winner of the week wrote to me explaining that he couldn't come in person to collect his reward because he was confined to a wheelchair. He was delighted when I turned up unannounced at his home and presented him with his prize. 'I never expected this would happen,' he confided. There was not much social awareness of disability at that time.

### ***Modern Jazz and The Big Record***

*Modern Jazz* was tailor-made for jazz lovers and filled the 9 p.m. time slot on Wednesdays, with a repeat broadcast on Friday afternoons. The music of Louis Armstrong, Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald and Frank Sinatra featured prominently. *The Big Record* was a one-hour show played at 5 p.m. on Sundays. I would put together a playlist of golden oldies (from the 1940s and 1950s) from the likes of Perry Como, Pat Boone, Doris Day and the Andrews Sisters. The target of these two shows was more mature listeners. It was a deliberate strategy on my part, amongst others I employed, to expand my demographic scope.

### ***Lucky Dip***

*Lucky Dip* was a live show on Monday afternoons (rescheduled to every Tuesday in 1967), 4.30 to 5.30 p.m. It is one of the proudest

achievements of my career. Teddy Robin and The Playboys, and Joe Junior and The Side effects were my resident bands. The programme served as a platform for young amateur and professional talent seeking to hit it big in music. In order to participate, performers and spectators alike needed to contact me directly. Rehearsal was mandatory for all artists. The show was a mammoth hit, especially with teenagers. We had to move from Studio One, the original premises with a maximum capacity of 60 people, to the 400-seater City Hall Theatre – and still tickets were hard to come by.

During each show, a member of the audience would be selected at random to stand and read out a listener's request letter. If he or she made mistakes in pronunciation, I would correct them. This served as an educational element of the show, whereby I would encourage youngsters in a better command of English usage.



■ An audience member reads out a listener's request, *Lucky Dip*, 1967.

Page 20, The STAR, Hongkong, Tuesday 26, August, 1969.

# Last Lucky Dip show unbelievable

**F**ANS HAD to sit on the floor and many came close to being trampled as they packed Radio Hongkong's Studio One yesterday for the last in the series of Lucky Dip shows.

"This is just unbelievable," Ray Cordeiro said as he watched close to 500 fans pack themselves into the studio.

"There is hardly any space for the groups and the singers."

It was obvious that the majority of the fans had come to see Teddy Robin and the Playboys in action again.

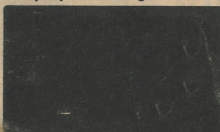
When they started playing it was like 1967 all over again.

## Felt ill

Joe Jr had to cut his performance down to three songs and left early complaining to Ray that he did not feel well.

"I felt ill in the morning but came anyway because I didn't want

to miss the last show," he said. Peter Nelson, backed by the All-Stars, was in great form as he sang his hit, Skye Boat Song.



But listeners tuned in to radio sets at home probably heard more than anyone in the studio where the screaming was deafening.

Over the past eight weeks Ray Cordeiro has proved that the Hongkong pop scene is alive and well in Radio Hongkong's Studio One.



● TEDDY ROBIN.

Cutting from *The Star*.

‘Uncle Ray is a radio legend! There is no one like him and I especially love watching him in action at the studio! I am so thankful and honoured to have released an album with him called *Uncle Ray & Christine Samson All Our Way*. He chose most of the wonderful songs in that album and we had a good time recording them. Thank you for the music, Uncle Ray! You’re the Best!’

*Christine Samson*  
Singer and Voice Coach

‘Uncle Ray is kind of phenomenon who has never forgotten his roots, treating local musicians with respect and offering encouragement. He is larger than life but as humble as one can be. He has been and will always be a stalwart of broadcasting and Hong Kong’s music scene.

I am privileged in my life to have had the opportunity and honour to know and have Uncle Ray as a friend.’

*Vasco da Costa*  
Bassist of The Mystics

## CHAPTER FIVE

# THE SIXTIES

**I**N THE SIXTIES I received hundreds of letters at work each day. Most people wanted to dedicate a song to family, friends or loved ones, but some solicited advice on how to become a disc jockey or singer. There were also numerous nightclub and bar acts desperate for a break. With imported western music mainstream in the early 1960s, only a few Hong Kong artists got the chance to record a single. Genuine talent was slipping through the cracks. Something needed to be done.



The golden days of being a disc jockey, the 1960s.



## **LOCALISATION OF WESTERN POP CULTURE**

The main motivation behind my programme *Lucky Dip* was to create a live setting for new, unknown or upcoming acts to raise their own profiles. Confidence and flair were key elements required to stand out. A rare few were able to show off authentic song material. Those who really shone layered a distinctive or unique style on the popular western tunes they covered. Some were so impressive they garnered attention from record companies. Additional exposure via my other radio programmes saw cover music skyrocket to be the dominant sound in the colony. The popularity of *Lucky Dip* was not only validation of my hitherto efforts but also the increasingly positive impact the artists on the show were having across the local music industry.

### **Roman Tam and The Four Steps**

Roman Tam was a true legend of the local music scene. He started as Roman and the Four Steps in the 1960s soon after moving to Hong Kong from Guangzhou. Roman and his band were scheduled to perform on *Lucky Dip*. Unfortunately, the rehearsal was a bit of a disaster. The music arrangement for the English song Roman chose was flat and his singing was mumbled. I didn't want to disappoint him, but I couldn't approve such a substandard effort for broadcast. Something else was needed. I asked Roman, 'Do you have a song with vocal harmonies?'

'Yes,' he replied.

'Sing it with your band for me.'

The difference was night and day, resulting in the successful first appearance of Roman Tam and the Four Steps on radio.

In 1969, I received a new promotional single from Roman and the Four Steps called 'Day Dream'. Roman's enunciation was so poor that half the time I didn't know what the actual lyrics were. I decided not to play the song on any of my shows out of respect to listeners and to stand up for my profession. Also: my show, my standards, my rules. The story made the news in the *China Mail*, an English newspaper in Hong Kong, on 8 October 1969. Robert Ascott, manager of EMI Hong Kong, downplayed the matter: 'We respect Ray Cordeiro's decision, but it's just like an English number sung with a French accent. Roman will record more Mandarin numbers.' In reality, Roman was a brilliant singer whose rise to stardom wasn't going to be derailed by the handicap of singing in broken English. By concentrating on Cantonese and Mandarin tunes he quickly won people over.

At my 70th birthday bash at the Regal Riverside Hotel in 1994, Roman had a surprise in store for me. He told me onstage, 'I picked this song for you tonight, Uncle Ray. I hope you like it.' The song was 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes'. I took it all in and was profoundly moved. His vocal skills, level of emotion and English pronunciation were impeccable. He was only a raw teenager when I met him on *Lucky Dip*, but now he had grown into a music giant. He worked extremely hard to achieve continuous success up until he passed away in 2002. He is sorely missed.

### **Michael Remedios**

Not all people seize the opportunities presented to them. Soul singer Michael Remedios was one such young example. One Tuesday afternoon in 1969, Michael was supposed to appear at 2 p.m. for his sound check and run-through on *Lucky Dip*. Participants were expected to be punctual – preparation is critical for a live show. Michael was still

in bed when I called at 2.45 p.m. The producer rang again at 3.30 p.m. He finally arrived at the studio 45 minutes later with a pathetic excuse.

‘Sorry,’ he said, ‘but I must get nine hours of sleep before I can sing properly.’

I decided to make an example out of Michael and banned him from appearing on any of my programmes.

The *China Mail* also caught wind of this incident.

In an interview with them Michael repeated his excuse, saying, ‘Sleep comes before everything to me, and lately I’ve had insomnia. So I must take care of my health.’ He then added, ‘I can do nothing about it if Ray has decided to drop me.’

I don’t recall how we settled our differences, but the following year we travelled together for the Osaka Expo.



■ Michael Remedios, a regular performer on *Lucky Dip*, 1968.

### The Quests

The Quests, a popular band from Singapore, were invited to showcase their talents on *Lucky Dip*. Typically, performers got an enthusiastic reception as soon as they took to the stage at rehearsal. That afternoon, however, the audience response was muted – not because the band were bad, people simply didn't know who they were. Both the Quests and I were terribly embarrassed. As the host, it was important to foster a fun and friendly atmosphere. In the end, I told the crowd that performers needed our respect and support. The Quests weren't here for money but to entertain and have a good time with all. I asked for an appropriate response and got one. The mood lifted and we went on to have a great show.



■ Singaporean pop group the Quests perform on *Lucky Dip*, late 1960s.

## **LUCKY DIP LEGACY**

*Lucky Dip* featured many regulars: Teddy Robin, Michael Remedios, Joe Junior, Danny Diaz, Christine Samson, Joe Chen, Irene Ryder and Marilyn Palmer were the most prominent. The show was great for public relations and single sales, but the artists themselves deserve the credit for their own hard work paying off. People loved their cover songs, even preferring them to the original versions.

However, I also began to realise that fan loyalty and the attitude of both nightclub owners and recording companies created obstacles that hindered the evolvement of the local music scene. Firstly, fans continued to root for their idols even when they sang out of tune. Secondly, nightclub managements offered no incentive to local bands to innovate, forcing them instead into playing what management considered good, commercial and money-making music: the audiences were happy, and the cash rolled in. Finally, and importantly, there was a dearth of original music in town. Local recording companies continued to encourage artists to cover western pop; they didn't like original music because it was risky in terms of sales. The producers were also at fault in not offering the public new sounds. Samuel Hui, Danny Diaz and Norman Cheng were among the rare few willing to compose new music in the late 1960s. The situation gradually improved in the decades that followed.

Despite this, the stock of local young performers continued to rise, some reaching the summit of the Hong Kong music scene, to wit: Norman Cheng from the Playboys became number one in the domestic recording business; Ricky Fung, lead guitarist of the Mystics, is the former managing director of EMI Hong Kong and current chairman of the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (Hong

Kong Group) Limited; the late Joe Chen of the Menace led the way for Chinese disc jockeys in Hong Kong; and William Kwan from the Playboys became the producer of superstar Alan Tam.

All good things come to an end. In the case of *Lucky Dip*, that happened when the star attraction at home was no longer the radio receiver but the television set. I realised it was unrealistic to compete with Television Broadcasts Limited (TVB), the new TV station, and so *Lucky Dip* quietly went off the air in late 1969. As the Buggles lamented a decade on, 'Video Killed the Radio Star'. Still, a sizeable number of fans continuously contacted me to express their disappointment. It was enough to convince me to give the show a proper send-off by arranging one last, shortened season at Studio One in Broadcasting House. All the *Lucky Dip* loyalists were there for an emotionally charged finale, with some female fans reduced to tears.



Christine Samson was another regular on *Lucky Dip*, 1968.





■ Teddy Robin and the Playboys were the resident band of *Lucky Dip* from 1967.



■ Happy faces on *Lucky Dip*, late 1960s.

Page 14, The STAR, Hongkong, Thursday, November 16, 1967.

# 'Uncle Ray' leads a full and hectic life

**W**HERE the action is, that's where you'll find Ray Cordeiro.

Since joining Radio Hongkong seven years ago, Ray has built up a tremendous following here with his popular request programmes and disc-jockey shows.

For those of you who are interested in taking up broadcasting as a career, I've asked Ray to give us an idea of how he spends an average working day.

"I get up at 7.45 am and take my time over breakfast, which usually consists of bacon and eggs with toast and coffee," he tells me.

He starts work at about nine, and begins by planning his day's work and then answering urgent letters.

Ray is in charge of light music, which means that he not only supervises the pop programmes but also jazz and easy-listening music.

All the music has to be selected and scripts made up for the day.

Ray's biggest task is arranging the request programmes. He gets more than 300 letters a day requesting songs on the various programmes.

Of course, every request cannot be played, so he has to choose the songs so that the majority of his listeners are satisfied.

"Obviously, I can't read out every request," he says, "and I hope that the teenagers under-

stand my position."

He often gets phone calls after a programme from teenagers who are disappointed that their particular dedication was not read.

"When this happens I usually try to remember the person's name and play one of his or her requests next time," he says. "I try to be as fair as possible."

One of Ray's most successful ventures has been the "live" Lucky Dip Show which is held in the City Hall Theatre every Tuesday afternoon.

It's a request programme with live guest groups. The resident group is Joe Jr and the Side-Effects.

Right from the first show the hall has been packed with happy, screaming teenagers. The response was so terrific that tickets were sold on the black market until the system of distribution was changed.

## Giant show

Just before Christmas a giant show is planned on the same lines, with the proceeds going to Operation Santa Claus.

Ray finishes work at Radio Hongkong about 6 pm, but he always has something extra lined up to keep him busy.

He's the leader of a popular dance band which plays at parties and dances around town. Music plays a large part in Ray's life. Apart from playing the drums himself, he has done a lot to encourage local talent.

It was Ray who brought Teddy Robin and the Playboys to the attention of the Diamond Music Company, who were so impressed that they signed them up right away.

He produced their first record, Lies, which has been one of the biggest local hits ever.

Ray doesn't go out of his way to find new groups - he's much too busy. But he's always willing to help anyone with advice.

"I will do anything I can to promote local talent," he says. "I feel that with Hongkong being so much in the news, it's only a matter of time before one of the local groups becomes famous internationally."

Finally, a word of advice from your "Uncle Ray" - as he's known to Hongkong teenagers:

"I would personally advise teenagers when they go to a party or pop show to behave themselves. Scream as much as you like when your idols appear, but behave yourselves when other artists are playing and don't behave foolishly in public."

Another cutting from *The Star*, 1967.



## OPERATION SANTA CLAUS

The first-ever Operation Santa Claus aired over three nights in 1960 from 19 to 21 December, 9.15 p.m. to midnight. This charity initiative was started by RHK with the objective of raising at least HK\$10,000 to buy and distribute Christmas gifts to disadvantaged children in Hong Kong.

Ted Thomas was the producer of the programme, overseeing a group of us disc jockeys playing donors' requests. (According to Ted, Operation Santa Claus originated at Rediffusion in the 1950s; *SCMP* and RHK dispute this.) Ian Kingsley, Deputy Director of RHK, hosted the last day's segment. At 9.15 p.m., Ian dressed in a Santa costume and set off for Victoria Peak, earning \$1,500 in sponsorship for every half mile he covered. The total money raised in 1960 exceeded \$50,000, an extremely tidy sum for the time.

Radio Hong Kong presenters continued contributing with stunts of their own. I recall in 1962 Ted Thomas and Nick Kendall agreed to strand themselves on a buoy in the middle of Victoria Harbour, and in another year John Wallace volunteered to climb up the flagpole atop the Hong Kong Hilton in Central. 'Rescue' came when their fundraising targets were achieved.

Fast forward to 9 p.m. on 18 December 1965, the coldest day in eleven years. That year I had won the inaugural Top Hong Kong Disc Jockey Poll and my name had been put forward for the Operation Santa Claus grand finale, billed as the 'big splash'. Around 3,000 boisterous fans had gathered at Queen's Pier, making it tough for the police to keep the crowd in order. I meanwhile stood on the deck of the fireboat *Alexander Grantham* out in Victoria Harbour.

Eddie Au Yeung, a popular disc jockey from RHK's Chinese service, had nobly agreed to join me in the finale and we still had a couple of

hours to steel ourselves before plunging into the freezing swell. The only thing that could spare us was if someone pledged a nominated donation. In an attempt to add some comic relief to proceedings (and to warm ourselves up), Eddie and I pretended to be chased around the vessel by fire services volunteers dressed up as bloodthirsty pirates.

The time had arrived to jump. Donned in frogman gear, we could just about make out Queen's Pier with the crowd in seemingly good spirits despite the drizzle and temperature drop. It was 11°C, frigid conditions by Hong Kong standards. I was shivering and the thought of having to throw myself into an apparent abyss had me panic-stricken. Everybody on the pier was looking on and I was doing this for charity. Backing out wasn't an option, so in I jumped.

The icy sea water shocked me. I fought my way to the surface, took a gulp of air and then swam towards the pier as quickly as possible. On the way, I heard people rooting for me. I did my best to maintain composure, keeping up appearances by pausing to wave to the fans standing at the pier, even though I was far from calm on the inside.



■ That icy swim remains one of my worst but most memorable experiences.

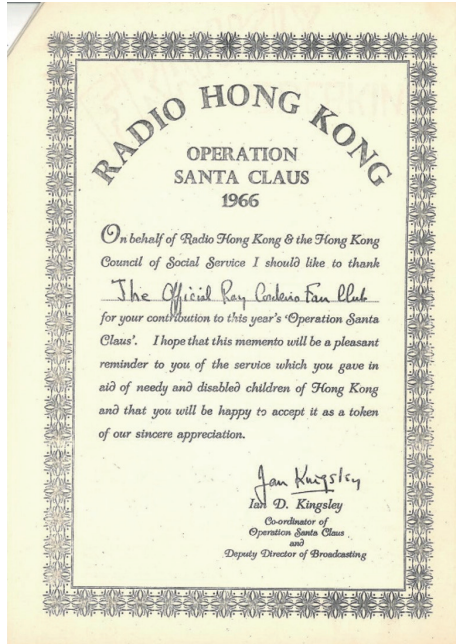
My arrival at the pier was greeted with applause. However, because I veered off course and ended up emerging on the other side of the pier, it caused a mess for the reporters. They had to fight through the crowd to take photographs and interview me.

The first person to reach me was Eddie Au Yeung's wife. She handed me a bottle of brandy, which I declined, and a flask of hot coffee that I downed instantly, allowing the warmth to radiate through my whole body. In a later interview with John Wallace, I was informed that the general manager of Electra Instruments Limited did put up the sum that would have seen us avoid the big splash, but it came in too late. He generously donated the money anyway. To think I was so close to a reprieve!



█ Post-plunge interview, 1965.

In both 1966 and 1967, the Official Ray Cordeiro Fan Club, converted its year-end party to a Christmas charity event at the Bayside Restaurant and Night Club in Tsim Sha Tsui. The aim was to do our bit for Operation Santa Claus. Tickets were sold at \$5.50 each and limited to one per member. Proceeds after deducting operating expenses were donated to Operation Santa Claus, which amounted to \$700 in 1966 and \$7,000 the following year including sponsor donations.



RHK's acknowledgement of the Fan Club's donation, 1966.



Dressed as Santa Ray with Joe Junior as a Christmas gift to *Lucky Dip* listeners and live-show audience, 1968.



Since 1988, the *SCMP* and RTHK have remained the co-organisers of this charity initiative. For my 95th birthday celebrations in 2019, I pre-sold 100 sets of signed English and Chinese versions of my autobiography at \$1,000 each, raising \$100,000 (for Operation Santa Claus in 2020).

## **THE RIOTS OF 1967**

The Hong Kong music scene was on an upwards trajectory. Many locals happily immersed themselves in western pop culture. At the same time, others inspired by the Cultural Revolution in China were ready to strike out against the British for the perceived discrimination they exhibited in Hong Kong. In 1967, *Lucky Dip*'s live show was forced to stop for a couple of months because of the riots, and *The Star* newspaper cancelled the Most Popular DJ Poll.

The background to this was that in November 1966 Macau police prevented ongoing construction of Fong Chong School in Taipa. The Macau government justified the action on the basis that building permits had yet to be issued – a delaying tactic designed to frustrate Chinese communist sponsorship of the school despite the authorities having approved the land for development. The local Chinese, already unhappy with a segregated education system that further denied them subsidies afforded to the Portuguese and Macanese, were incensed, sparking confrontations between protestors and law enforcement. The situation quickly turned unruly.

A series of arrests on 3 December 1966 prompted larger-scale grievances and an upsurge in anti-administration support. It wasn't until the intervention of the People's Republic of China to facilitate negotiations with the Portuguese-run government that the conflict was

put to an end in January 1967. Macau's governor proceeded to sign a statement of apology.

Students in Hong Kong were emboldened to follow the lead of events in Macau. Dressed in protest uniform of navy-blue trousers and white shirts, they carried out mass demonstrations and exploded homemade bombs concealed in unmarked packages across the territory, which had everyone terrified and on edge. Government officials had expected disturbances but not to this extent. Yet despite the growing insurrection, the Hong Kong police and local British forces strangely remained on the sidelines, showing no inclination to intervene.

It was 20 May 1967. I was preparing my show in a studio on the sixth floor of Beaconsfield House on Queen's Road Central, where I had moved to from Mercury House to conduct the programme for a few days. This was the top floor of a building, which was then an integral component of the Central Government Offices housing the Information Services Department on the two uppermost floors, the Royal Hong Kong Regiment on the lower floors and a post office at ground level. Meanwhile, across the road at the Bank of China building, adjacent to HSBC headquarters, mounted speakers blasted propaganda onto the streets below. Donald Brooks, Director of Broadcasting, told me to start my show that day on the roof. I was puzzled. When I reached the roof, it suddenly all made sense. The British army had erected speakers of their own, specifically eight giant horn speakers, and directed them at the Bank of China building. The music I played could be heard all the way to the Star Ferry terminal. This upset the Bank of China contingent no end inasmuch as the rhetoric coming out of their much smaller, tinny speakers had been drowned out.

As my show was going on, a teenage Maria Cordero, one of our best singers and cooking show hosts in Hong Kong, happened to be in

Central. I was none the wiser until I met up with her at the KCC in 2019. She told me she has fond memories of that day and picks up the story:

The horn speakers on the rooftop were really big and loud. I was there with some other teenagers standing outside the Bank of China. From one side we heard the Beatles singing ‘She loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah...’, followed by Chubby Checker urging ‘Come on everybody! ...let's twist again’; on the bank's side, Chinese propaganda percolated out of their little speakers. It was a very strange scene; there was no competition. We couldn't resist the attraction of the pop music played by Uncle Ray, so we danced. It was great fun. We were too young to understand the danger of partying at the heart of such a protest.

The student demonstrations escalated in violence, with projectiles thrown at police and passing vehicles. The police remained calm and passive. But just when everybody thought the protesters had won, the hatchet came down. The government imposed emergency regulations, granting the police special powers to quell the unrest. Left-wing newspapers were banned from publishing, pro-China schools were shut down and protest leaders were arrested and detained.

On 22 May 1967, there was a mass-scale demonstration along Garden Road. Fully armed, the police worked their way to the largest congregation of student dissenters, just outside the Hilton hotel, and launched into a full-frontal assault, wielding batons with impunity. Protesters fell like bowling pins with blood flowing in all directions. It was a free-for-all, violence on a brutal level. Incredibly, worse was to come in the months ahead. On 24 August 1967, Lam Bun, a commentator at Commercial Radio, was doused in petrol in his car, set on fire and burnt alive. As a radio man myself, I was alarmed. By the time the civil unrest subsided at the end of the year, scores had been

killed or injured. The territory was at its lowest ebb since the Second World War. People had lost confidence with the colonial government. Many sold their homes and properties and moved overseas.

If there was a silver lining to the resultant bloodshed, it was the transformation in the prevailing attitude among British expatriates to look down on other nationalities, especially the Chinese. Pardon my language, but too many of them behaved like bastards. Seeing Hong Kong people treated with more respect in the aftermath of the riots was a welcome and long-overdue change.

The social upheaval of 2019 draws an unwanted parallel to events in 1967. That locals clashed with one another, rather than outsiders, only made it worse – and all the more distressing. Families have been deeply divided along generational lines. The young feel increasingly ignored and disenfranchised, the seething resentment at the perceived erosion of their civil liberties swept up in a wave of violence. Initial sympathy from older citizens turned to hostility, the protesters' flagrant disregard of law and order, jeopardising livelihoods and personal safety, being the final straw. The relative peace we used to enjoy had been shattered. There was no right or wrong any longer, only friend or foe.

I am no activist, nor have I ever engaged in political agendas. I prefer to steer clear of social commentary, especially when it's so relentlessly adversarial. I am truly saddened by how precarious a state our society found itself in, like a powder keg about to ignite. But I am also optimistic. For nearly a century, I've lived through a world war, two occurrences of extreme civil unrest, SARS and now the Covid-19 pandemic. History makes it clear that Hong Kong can bounce back. Love and trust one another. Stay united. Respect personal freedom. Home is where the heart is, and Hong Kong is my home.

‘To our dearest respected DJ Uncle Ray, the legend of Hong Kong broadcasting history: We love you “All The Way” with the good music you have brought to us all these years.

I know you’re a good friend of my father’s and he always spoke highly of you. He once said to me, “If you want to make a recording, go see Uncle Ray and see what he can do for you.” My father was right, if not for Uncle Ray, there would be no Joe Junior. Your prudent guidance of me and my peers has been most valuable and appreciated.

God bless you and “Here’s a Heart” crying out lots of love for you.’

*Joe Junior*  
Singer and Actor

‘It is an honour of a lifetime to have known Uncle Ray. He is not only a mentor but also a close friend, and willing to help people and promote local music. He is the real “Godfather of Pop”. I wish Uncle good health and happiness.’

*Frederick Chan*  
Drummer of The Playboys

## CHAPTER SIX

# OSAKA EXPO 1970

**O**NE MORNING in 1969, I received a call from a senior executive of the Information Services Department of the government inviting me to be the road manager for a group of Hong Kong pop artists and musicians to be chosen to perform for a month at the upcoming Osaka Expo. I agreed immediately, considering it to be a great honour. I had a feeling, however, that it would be difficult to find a worthwhile line-up because those I really wanted in the group were popular and were doing well with different record labels, both as performers and producers. In reality, I would be asking them to leave their work behind for four weeks to come and stay in Osaka. Amazingly, everyone I contacted was delighted at the opportunity to travel abroad and spend time with me. As the song goes, 'That's what friends are for.' The experience really cemented our friendship. Our pop group, named Soul Agents, was finalised and the last thing left to secure was a state-of-the-art sound system. I approached Tsang Fook Piano Company Limited seeking sponsorship and they generously loaned us their latest equipment. We were all set to take Japan by storm.

The members of Soul Agents were Joe Junior, Michael Remedios and Irene Ryder (lead singers); Norman Cheng, Frederick Chan and William Kwan from Teddy Robin and the Playboys (lead guitarist,



drummer and bassist, respectively); Ricky Fung (rhythm guitarist of the Mystics); and Ricky Chan (keyboardist of the D'Topnotes).

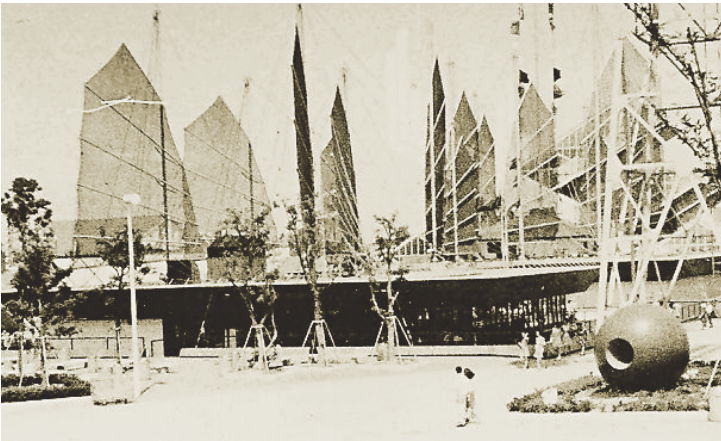
The Osaka Expo ran for six months from 15 March to 13 September 1970 and was the first Expo to be held in Asia. The theme for the international event was 'Progress and Harmony for Mankind' and it was Japan's opportunity 25 years after the war to showcase its advanced technological skills. The lofty ideals of the theme were intended also to demonstrate that while mankind had made great industrial and technological progress since the first Great Exhibition (or Expo) in London in 1851, countries should not overlook the central importance of humankind and the environment they lived in. The Soul Agents were there to provide some soft, cultural power.

Expo '70 was hugely successful and attracted more than 64 million visitors. Imagine what an experience it was for our young group to represent Hong Kong on such an international stage.

We arrived on 16 June but Michael Remedios had somehow gone missing. As one of the three lead singers in our group, this could have been disastrous. In the end, staff from the Information Services Department collected him from a police station. He had lost his way, and unable to communicate with the taxi drivers he had sought help from police.

The Hong Kong Pavilion, one of 116 pavilions, was inventively designed, complete with 13 batwing sails on its roof to represent Chinese sailing junks, which were still then a common sight in Hong Kong's harbour. Relying solely on wind power, these sailing vessels were undeniably environmentally friendly – although they could be said to be putting in a farewell appearance! The pavilion was attractive and housed, among other facilities, a large exhibition hall displaying varied facets of Hong Kong life, including its architecture,

crafts, culture and commercial enterprise, and a restaurant. The performances by Soul Agents took place on an under-cover but open balcony that served as a stage for the pavilion. This was set at a slightly lower level than the pavilion floor and surrounding walkways, and so audiences in effect had an all-round view of the shows.



Expo '70: the Hong Kong Pavilion.



Soul Agents in Osaka. From left: Ricky Fung, Michael Remedios, Norman Cheng, Frederick Chan, Joe Junior, Irene Ryder, me, William Kwan, Expo representative and Ricky Chan, 1970.

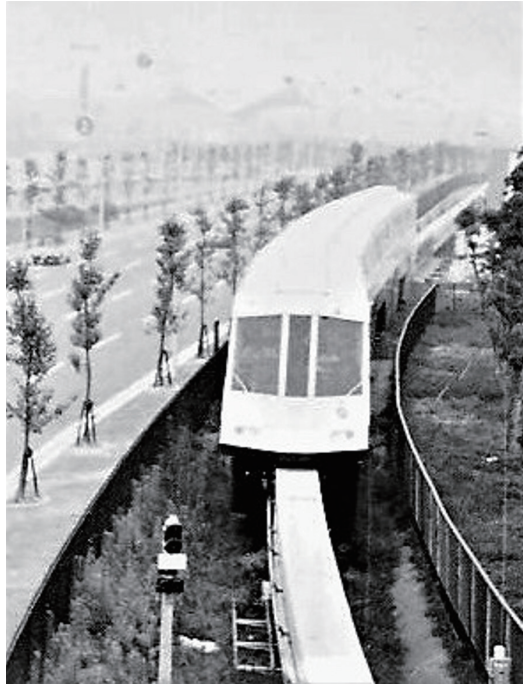
The much larger United Kingdom Pavilion was right next to us, and our ‘big brother’ looked after us well, happily sharing facilities and generously supplying us with cigarettes and other goodies, such as biscuits, candies and wine. But it was the cigarettes we valued most because we didn’t know where to get them, and of course almost everyone smoked back then. Those in the UK Pavilion were our biggest cheerleaders and proud of the popularity we gained.

We had been told before our departure for Osaka that we would be responsible for preparing our own food. At a press conference in Hong Kong, we disclosed our meal plan to reporters and who would be preparing what:

JOE JUNIOR	Minced beef and shredded potato.
MICHAEL REMEDIOS	Winter melon soup.
NORMAN CHENG	Fried eggs.
FREDERICK CHAN	Steamed pork patty with salted duck egg.
IRENE RYDER	Tea lady. I don’t ‘cook’.

In truth, it was a complete nonsense. No one was willing to cook except Norman. Luckily, we had found on arrival that the pavilion had a Cantonese restaurant run by Hong Kong’s Maxim’s Group. It spared us from going hungry, especially as language proved an issue when we tried to eat in local Japanese restaurants. We didn’t live in the pavilion but in comfortable, if simple, accommodation in two apartments in downtown Osaka that we reached by an impressive monorail. I kept Irene company in one while the boys shared the other, dormitory-style. The apartments did have kitchens, but we didn’t make much use of them, apart from Norman turning his hand to toast and fried eggs in the mornings, the ingredients for which we bought from a local

supermarket. To make his culinary performance more interesting one day, someone in the group decided to pre-boil the eggs and put them back in the fridge. Norman good-humouredly played along with his inability to break open the shells, remonstrating, 'What's up with these eggs!' The rest of the group meanwhile stood by and uncontrolledly 'cracked up'. They were, after all, most of them just out of their teens.



The Osaka Expo monorail: a novel Japanese experience in 1970.

Being the road manager, I took care of everything for the group in Osaka, including stage truss and rigging. Thanks to our up-tempo style and professional-grade sound equipment, we were in constant demand to perform at different weekend dance parties. The pinnacle of our engagements was being invited to perform before His Imperial Highness Crown Prince Akihito and his wife at the Japan Pavilion. We

dedicated a modified version of ‘Kowloon, Hong Kong’, a celebrated song in Hong Kong, to the royal couple.

Our twice-daily shows drew enormous crowds. Even the restaurant staff at our pavilion would abandon their workstations to watch us. The popularity of Soul Agents was typified by what was scheduled to be a 45-minute performance on 26 June, but to the cries of ‘More, more!’ echoing throughout the pavilion it lasted for three hours, and still the crowd refused to let up. Our stature even extended to acts from other countries asking us to join them on their sets. One of them was Wales’s Mary Hopkin, known for her massive hit ‘Those Were the Days’. With so many commitments, we reluctantly had to turn down the opportunity to appear at a reception on 4 July in Mary’s honour. Towards the end of our time in Japan, the Hong Kong and UK pavilions jointly hosted the biggest and most triumphant Soul Agents party celebration yet. It was a fitting way to round off an enormously successful trip.



Soul Agents: Michael Remedios, Irene Ryder, Joe Junior, Ricky Fung and William Kwan.

Just as in Hong Kong, Joe Junior's charm and good looks drove female Japanese fans into a frenzy. It made the other bandmates jealous. One evening, Joe told us he was not feeling well and wished to stay behind at the dormitory.

Fifty years later, he recounted what happened: 'I was whistling "Raindrops Keep Falling on my Head" while taking a shower before bed. Suddenly, I heard another voice repeating the song, but there was no one around. I was so scared I ran out from the shower and hid under a blanket. It made me very nervous for quite some time. In fact, I felt sick.'

The dormitory wasn't haunted, of course. It was just a practical joke played on him by the other group members. I trust Joe took it in good humour, no doubt appreciating his mates in Osaka were quite a raucous bunch and enjoyed winding others as well as each other up.

One of our government representatives was a portly guy who put on airs and graces, and it provoked everybody. We all bit our tongues for the sake of an equable relationship, except Irene Ryder, who finally snapped and took him to task. The 'payback' didn't end there, either. Aware that the man loved playing cards, they set up a game and proceeded to fleece him. Nobody was going to mess with Soul Agents!

Right opposite to the Hong Kong Pavilion was the Hitachi Pavilion, which was shaped like a UFO. Its Exhibition Hall was located on the second floor and was reached via an escalator that led up to its lobby. Whenever Soul Agents performed, visitors would pause at the bottom of the escalator and then turn towards our pavilion instead, drawn to what they were hearing. This annoyed the Hitachi people and they complained to the organiser that our music had exceeded sound limits. Technicians came and measured the decibel level of our music, which indeed was too high. Nothing came of it. By the time a warning



was issued, we were on our way to Tokyo for the last leg of our Japan tour. Ricky Chan, Michael Remedios, Joe Junior and Irene Ryder didn't travel with the rest of the group and entourage as they had prior commitments in Hong Kong. Notable highlights of seeing round Tokyo were an evening at Club Mugen where most of the foreign bands performed and a visit to the Japan Elvis Presley Fan Club.

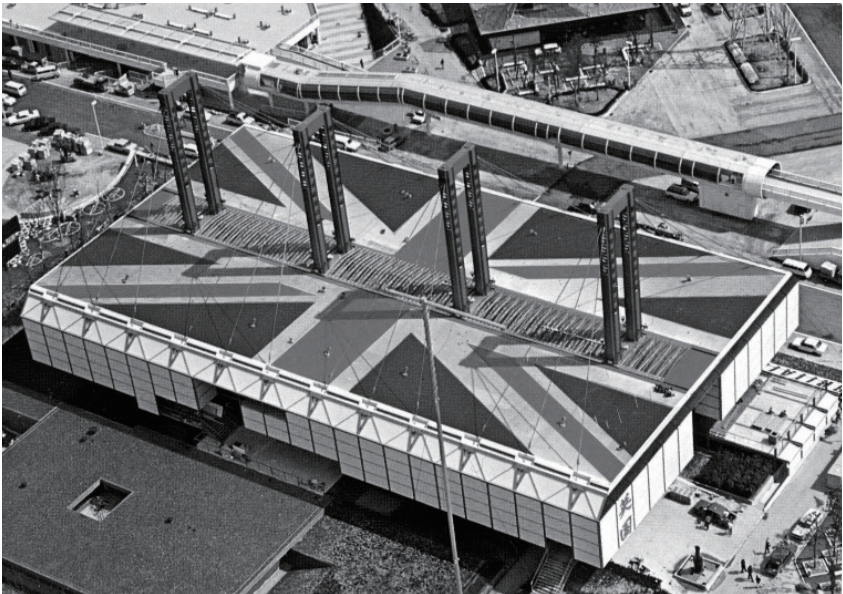
The time we spent in Japan in 1970 was a real eye-opener. The sheer scale of Expo '70, the modern highways, the comprehensive subway system and bullet train, the variety of food and shopping, and the dizzying array of neon lights at night were all excitingly new to us.

In the meantime, our exploits at the Osaka Expo were well covered by the Hong Kong press.

Before we had set off for Osaka, the Polydor recording company in Hong Kong had collaborated with Soul Agents to release a one-off album to commemorate the launch of its label. A mix of original music and cover songs made up the twelve-track LP. Polydor producer Norman Cheng was ecstatic that Joe Junior and Michael, two top male artists in Hong Kong in the 1970s, were the group's lead singers. Irene didn't feature as she was signed to rival label EMI. Polydor had spared no expense putting together the album with the latest and best recording equipment, and the LP was a massive success for Polydor Hong Kong. The album was also made available in the Japanese market because after Osaka, Norman viewed Japan as a potential market for Hong Kong pop stars. And how correct he was. Teresa Teng, for example, had great success in Japan with the Polydor label in the 1970s, causing her popularity to boom elsewhere in Asia, singing as by then she did in Mandarin, Cantonese, Japanese and English.



■ Hitachi Pavilion



■ United Kingdom Pavilion

‘Uncle Ray is a Hong Kong legend.

Ray Cordeiro first came to prominence as a Radio DJ from Rediffusion in the late 1950s. When local youngsters began to embrace Anglo-American pop music, his choice of music and programming style at Radio Hong Kong captured a definitive Chinese following to an English radio channel. In recollection, it was his love for sharing music and promoting the local cover bands actively in the '60s that laid the seeds for the phenomenal success by Hong Kong in building the “Cantopop” culture in the '70s which lasted for decades, conquering Chinese audiences all over the world. His fame and connection with music is well established both locally and internationally.

There have been so many accolades bestowed on him throughout his lifelong career. We, in Hong Kong, have to add “Thank you, Uncle Ray, for being there for us, at the right time and the right place. What would the Hong Kong music industry be without your being part of it from the beginning?”

*Ricky Fung*  
Chairman, International Federation of the  
Phonographic Industry Hong Kong

‘Music giant, just incredible!’

*Johnny Yip*  
Singer

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# FIFTY YEARS AND COUNTING

**T**HE SIXTIES was the decade of Band Sound in Hong Kong, a genre of music unique to the territory that blended western pop culture with local musical influences. Its youthful, upbeat vibe didn't just capture a massive following among people who had grown tired of the existing staid music styles, it seduced many kids into rushing to form bands of their own and fantasising about fame and fortune. There was a lot of talent around and I was determined to generate exposure and lend support using my influence as a prominent disc jockey. Not all resulted in success stories, naturally, but I'm proud to say of those that did I also made many long-time friends.

### **FROM FRIENDSHIP TO FAMILY**

In September 2019, nine of us met up at the KCC and reminisced about the 'good old days'. Joining me were Norman Cheng, Teddy Robin, Joe Junior, Danny Diaz, Christine Samson, Frederick Chan, Ricky Fung and Philip Chan. Some of these friends had played together in the sixties but had since gone their own ways, and so we had plenty to talk about. All of them had performed with bands that had risen to fame and we swapped stories of how we had fared in the changing music scene. I asked them to tell me their stories again.

### **Teddy Robin and The Playboys**

Teddy Robin was the lead singer of the Playboys, although Norman Cheng, lead guitarist, fronted the group. The other band members were William Kwan, bassist, Raymond Kwan, rhythm guitarist and Frederick Chan on drums.

Teddy, Raymond and William are siblings and started off as The Striplings in 1963. They were quite popular among teenagers and attracted some attention when awarded third place in a pop band contest organised by *The Star* newspaper, but they were still unable to land nightclub gigs. There was little interest in Chinese groups then; singers and musicians hired in the early 1960s mostly were part of local non-Chinese bands. Resorting to performing at schools or bars, the Striplings were going nowhere fast.

Arriving at the office one day in late 1966, I found an unexpected package on my desk. Inside was a tape recording with a cover letter from a band calling themselves Teddy Robin and the Playboys. The quality of the recording was terrible, and I was tempted to just toss it aside. But I didn't. I appreciated their initiative in reaching out to me, just as I had similarly approached the owner of Chantecler a couple of decades before and suggested turning the bakery into a dining club in the evenings. You need to fight for your future, I always said. I picked up the phone and called the Playboys, and soon realised they were the Striplings under a new name.

Norman Cheng wanted to tell the story then on from the Playboys' perspective:

We had been established for quite a while but without any success and facing an uncertain future. I suggested appointing a manager to help us. You, Uncle Ray, were our unanimous first choice. Then there was the question of

who would write our letter of introduction. We looked at each other hoping someone would speak up, and in the end I said I'd volunteer. Along with the request letter we enclosed a demo tape with three songs. Our recollection of the actual songs is fuzzy, but Teddy Robin thinks one of them was 'Lies'. We invited you to listen to our recordings. If you believed we had potential, we wanted you to be our manager.

It was a shock when you actually got in touch, although it was to tell us that as a civil servant you couldn't manage us. Nevertheless, you invited us to RHK's studio to re-record our songs. The original tape we'd sent along was actually put together at Ricky Fung's home because he was the only person we knew who owned a tape recorder. We could be excused for its poor quality, but the fact is it achieved our purpose – thanks in no small measure to your generous consideration!

Teddy Robin then joined in with what he remembered of the time:

Straight after our recording session at RHK, you kindly invited us to perform at your birthday party. We chose to sing Herman's Hermits' 'Listen People' because it suited our style. You loved it and introduced us to Robert Ascott, the manager of EMI, who was also at the party. Robert seemed enthusiastic and we thought our big chance had come. But it turned out to be a false dawn. If you remember, our breakthrough occurred when you introduced us to the recording manager of Diamond Music Limited, Lal Dayaram. Lal was keen on developing raw talent. He knew we had support from you and he soon offered us a recording contract. What you did for us went above and beyond. Uncle, you were our saviour. We quarrelled a lot with Lal but never with you. We were family; we are family still.

It's not an exaggeration to say you were already at the forefront of the Hong Kong music scene. We only sang covers in the sixties, with most of the



songs directly lifted from your radio shows. As there was so little original music around back then, song choice was crucial in order to stand out.

There also were many new groups in the 1960s and opportunities were scarce. Fortunately, you continued to champion young talent. For example, the *Lucky Dip* live show allowed bands not only to perform in front of a studio audience but also to reach radio listeners. Some of the artists and musicians subsequently became key figures in the Hong Kong music scene. This is the reason why so many people in Hong Kong see you as the ‘Godfather of Pop’.



■ Debut single of the Playboys, 1967.

I had taken a recording of what everyone had said when we met at the KCC, and listening later to Norman Cheng and Teddy Robin

describing those early years of their careers, these precious memories came flooding back. I remember them as boys walking into my office. They were sincere, energetic and determined. I liked them and I told myself I should do something for them. Although I couldn't be their manager, helping these boys secure a recording contract with Diamond Music Limited was immensely gratifying. They worked tremendously hard on their music and were frequent performers on *Lucky Dip*. Their songs were often featured on my other programmes. Eventually they became a top-rated pop band in Hong Kong.

Nurturing talent has remained a cornerstone of my career. Using my shows as a platform for that was a no-brainer. The sixties were the height of Band Sound, these acts were willing and able, and as a popular disc jockey I had the means to make a difference.

### **Joe Junior and The Side-Effects**

I have known Joe Junior, the son of my schoolmate Joseph Rodrigues, since he was a little boy. However, for a long time I had no idea he could sing. Joseph asked if I could help his son, so I spoke to Lal Dayaram of Diamond Music Limited and gained an introduction for Joe Junior. That's how he got his music career off the ground.

Like me, Joe Junior had family connections in Macau, and addressing me directly, he offered up some very kind words:

I followed Teddy and signed up with Diamond Music Limited. We considered you our godfather. You taught us so many things. Most of the songs I recorded you had actually recommended. We all know song selection is very important to the success of a recording artist. You had a big influence on my career. Given your job, the status you had and your extraordinary knowledge of music, I couldn't have found anyone better to offer me advice.



■ A novice singer is born, 1967.

In 1967 Joe Junior recorded ‘Here’s a Heart’, which was the most requested song on *Popularity Poll* for seven straight weeks. After every *Lucky Dip* appearance at City Hall, Joe Junior loyally stayed behind to mingle with his adoring fans until every last one of them had left. By his own admission, he was fond of them, too:

When I finished my performance at *Lucky Dip*, fans were always waiting for me at the rear door. I loved engaging with them and signing autographs – especially for those beautiful female fans! When onstage, I used to seek them out in the crowd. I wasn’t the only one. We all did the same!

Teddy Robin chimed in about the devotion of fans in the sixties:

Raymond, William and I lived together. We all had our own set of fans and most of them were somewhat obsessive. I can’t really explain it, but they had some magic power. They rang us at home and sometimes even showed up at our front door. Wherever we went, they followed. It was crazy. From personal experience, fans in Hong Kong were more hard-core than those from overseas. Compared with America, where you probably have to travel a long distance to see a show, Hong Kong is a small enough place for fans to get

close to their idols. That intimacy I believe also explains why they preferred our covers to the originals.

Teddy Robin and Joe Junior, who are now in their seventies, are still active in show business. As a close friend, I have witnessed the ups and downs in their careers. Joe Junior's brand of western pop made him very popular in the 1960s and early 1970s, a period during which Cantonese music was considered unsophisticated. This changed when Cantopop slowly but surely grabbed the limelight. By the end of the 1970s, local bands from a decade earlier had all but disappeared.

With the music landscape now transformed, Norman Cheng asked Joe Junior to consider switching careers and work in administration at PolyGram. Joe insisted singing was the only thing he wanted to do and found work at nightclubs and bars. He later signed up with TVB, obtaining minor parts in TV dramas and variety shows. It's accurate to say Joe Junior struggled a lot during that period.

Joe Junior's comeback happened in 2011 when he was cast in the role of deejay Dr. Dylan in the TV drama *When Heaven Burns* (天與地). In one episode, his character declares "This city is dying, you know?" The line resonated with viewers, echoing their own mounting sense of disquiet back then over the future well-being of Hong Kong. Joe Junior had won people's hearts and minds with a single sentiment, thrusting him back into the limelight. More recently, he was one of the stars in a popular travel show series *Three Amigos Bon Voyage* (三個小生去旅行). I'm so glad for Joe. He has devoted himself to singing and acting all his life. He deserves everything he has achieved.

In contrast, Teddy Robin decided to try his luck in Canada when the popularity of Band Sound faded in the 1970s. He explained:

I really didn't know what to do in the situation. Although I missed out on the bumper earnings of local artists in the eighties and nineties, I managed to save enough money for a down payment on a flat. In the early 1970s, the average price of a 900-square-foot apartment in Broadcast Drive was only \$45,000. In 1973, I considered touring Europe, but my friends suggested Canada instead. Starting from about that time, Cantopop became the new obsession in town. Even Norman Cheng and Ricky Fung were heavily involved in Cantopop productions. This was the new reality. Despite being a British colony, Hong Kong was, after all, a Chinese community at heart.

A year later in Canada, I heard the new Cantopop songs from Sam Hui, 'Tricky Double Stars' (鬼馬雙星) and the *Games Gamblers Play* love theme 'Double Stars' (雙星情歌), and Sandra Lang's 'Tears and Laughter of a Marriage' (啼笑姻緣). I understood the foreign music influence was over. I was lucky that Norman Cheng didn't let things lie. He kept urging me to come back. I finally returned in 1979 and recorded two film numbers: the theme song to *Cops & Robbers* (點指兵兵) and 'This is Love' (這是愛) for *The Story of Woo Viet* (胡越的故事). Both fared well but not as much as I had hoped, so I decided to turn to acting.

Teddy has worked hard on his movie career. He is a skilled actor and film maker. Recognition amongst his peers culminated in 2010 with the award of Best Male Actor by the Hong Kong Film Critics Society and winning Best Supporting Actor in the Hong Kong Film Awards, both for the action comedy film *Gallants* (打擂台). In the following year, Teddy Robin received the Music Achievement Award from the Composers and Authors Society of Hong Kong (CASH) for his contribution to the success of the local music scene. CASH is an agency of the Performing Rights Society of the UK in Hong Kong.

At the KCC, Teddy told us that he is now once more involved in the music scene. This time, however, he has adopted a supporting role

for the new generation of Band Sound and is coordinating with TV stations to generate publicity:

It's completely different now. I'm no longer focusing on myself but wish to help provide opportunities to young artists. I want to see them flourish. Just like your *Lucky Dip* in the 1960s, I try my best to get new young talents on my television show. I want other people to appreciate their hard work and potential. These days, the quality of underground and indie bands is rising, but getting them noticed on TV or radio is harder than ever. We have some richly talented young bands around. The problem is market share. They may be able to scramble money to self-finance an album or even attract investment, but consumers are less willing to pay for individual content, opting for music streaming services or video-sharing platforms instead. It really is a totally different situation from back when people routinely bought vinyl, cassettes and compact discs.

Uncle, your reach and influence are impossible for disc jockeys to match today. You appeared at the right time and place and developed a huge and loyal audience. Any musician wanting to become famous needed help from you. There were so many bands and pop singers in that period, it must have been hard choosing who to promote.

I see a link between the artists of the sixties and those of today, putting passion and honesty above all else. When we started, we didn't care about money. The younger generation today feels the same. All they want is an opportunity, and I will do all I can to make that happen for them. Band music is challenging; you need to constantly practise and rehearse, but I maintain this is crucial. Every city should have its unique vibe, and this is what Band Sound is all about. The reality is that the music scene in the sixties had a significant impact on the years that followed. Many key players subsequently retired and moved to working backstage.



I am so proud that Teddy Robin has followed in my footsteps and continues contributing to the local music scene. We need people like him to keep it alive.



Presenting the CASH Music Achievement Award to Teddy Robin, 2011.

### **Danny Diaz and The Checkmates**

Coming from a musical family no doubt heavily influenced Danny Diaz's career choice as a professional singer. With Danny as frontman, the rest of the Filipino rock band consisted of Danny's brothers Romeo and Rudi, and Doming Tantengo. Ray Cortes joined the group at a later stage.

One of their career highlights was on the *Battle of the Sounds* singing contest in 1968. Danny Diaz and the Checkmates emerged victorious. Teddy Robin and the Playboys filled the runners-up spot and the Mystics came third. In addition to prize money, the first-place winners were given a recording contract and a chance to perform in

Europe. Unfortunately for Danny and his band, the deal broke down during negotiations and they travelled to Brazil instead for a period before returning to Hong Kong.

I was one of the judges of the *Battle of the Sounds* that year. As much as I was cheering for the Playboys, the Checkmates deserved my top score. They were phenomenal and Danny Diaz possessed all the attributes to be a superstar. I loved Danny's voice so much that I asked him if he would compose and sing my theme song *All The Way With Ray*, which I have used to open my show since 1970.

In 1971, Danny was invited by Tom Lee Music to write the song 'How's Your Side of the World' and represent Hong Kong at the World Popular Song Festival in Tokyo, known also as the Yamaha Music Festival. He again represented Hong Kong at the Olympiad De La Chanson Festival in Athens, Greece, in 1972.

When the music scene was slowly taken over by Cantopop in the seventies, Danny decided to develop his career outside Hong Kong and secured a lucrative contract with his band to entertain at the Grand Hyatt Plaza International in Acapulco, Mexico, meeting and performing in front of countless star names from Tom Jones to the Carpenters. He then accepted an offer in Canada for the band for a couple of years, before the Checkmates finally disbanded in 1982. He married and stayed on in Canada as a solo act. It wasn't for another 15 years that Danny would return to Hong Kong for a brief spell as a personal favour to me, teaming up with the Checkmates once again for the Reunification Concert at the Hong Kong Coliseum in 1997.

Danny Diaz is the perfect showman. However, it's a curiosity that he prefers performing medleys to individual songs. Perhaps it's because Danny saw himself as more of an entertainer than a singer, but it grew to become his signature style.

Danny was keen to recount the time I indulged in some shenanigans with him:

One day, you invited me to your studio. We were having a great time chatting about the past, when suddenly you told me you needed to go to the washroom. You showed me how to operate the turntable and then left me alone in the studio. When the song that was playing ended, I switched on the microphone and said, 'Hi there! This is not Uncle Ray. I'm Danny Diaz, a new disc jockey. This is cool. Let's enjoy the next song.' I changed the record. The music started up again and then you returned and asked me how it went. I replied that everything was perfect, and we laughed.

It's fair to say that Danny is a very straightforward, if not blunt, individual. When he appeared on my show again several years ago, he told the audience that my show was a solo effort and I had to manage everything on my own. He found it ridiculous that RTHK would leave an old man of over 90 to fend for himself late at night. In reality, I see this as a good exercise in maintaining my independence.

Danny also touched on the rioting in Hong Kong in the second half of 2019:

As musicians we need to keep ourselves busy. We can't just sit around doing nothing. We need to keep performing, composing or finding new projects. Given the social unrest here, I plan to spend more time in Canada with my grandchildren as well as on music projects. The prospects seem better over there at the moment.

To me, Uncle Ray, you're not just a disc jockey, you're an icon. You have done a lot to promote and develop the local music scene. Most important of all, you haven't stopped in the last 70 years.



■ Danny Diaz (left) and the Checkmates play at the RHK studios, 1968.

### **The D'Topnotes**

Christine Samson was another popular singer in the 1960s.

Her father was Lobing Samson, a bandleader who moved from Shanghai to Hong Kong after the Second World War. The original D'Topnotes were Christine, Vikki and Michael Samson, Majid Rahman and Danny Chung. Joe Junior and the late Ricky Chan joined the band at a later stage. In the 1970s, Danny Chung and Majid Rahman teamed up with Eliza Chan and Johnny Yip and formed the New Topnotes. In those days, musicians routinely cooperated with one another, even swapping band members was part of the camaraderie. Those were fun times.

Christine has the voice of an angel and beauty to match, not to mention being an accomplished pianist. The D'Topnotes were in great demand in the 1960s and early 1970s. When focus shifted to Cantopop midway through the decade, Christine moved to America and studied voice coaching. Upon returning to Hong Kong, she joined forces with her sisters Vikki and Lizzie, and appeared as part of the Samson Sister

Trio. In 1998, Christine became a full-time voice coach and is now a mentor to superstars like Joey Yung, William So, G.E.M. and Alex Fong.

Christine had her own couple of anecdotes to share about our encounters in the sixties:

I have known you since I was a little girl because my father, Lobing, was your good friend. I have always called you Uncle Ray. Back in the day when I performed at Bayside in Tsim Sha Tsui, I would regularly see you there. It was such a popular and vibrant Hong Kong nightspot in the 1960s.

Everybody knows I am a singing coach now. Can you believe in the early 1960s local artists shied away from singing in English because they were convinced their poor enunciation would put off listeners? Stars like Nancy Sit, Josephine Shao Fong Fong and Roman Tam all approached me for help.



■ Christine Samson sings with the piano on *Lucky Dip*.

## **Philip Chan**

Going all the way back to 1963, I had an all-Portuguese band called Ray Cordeiro and The Satellites. We performed regularly at Savoy, one of the few nightclubs that existed then in Central District, until I went

to the UK in 1964. During that period we released one single 'Jamaican Mash' with Diamond Music. Philip Chan was the young singer of another resident band, led by Joseph Koo (顧家輝), that performed at Savoy. That was where I met him. Whenever Philip Chan's name is mentioned, people always say, 'Oh, the superintendent? The movie star?' It is a pity that so few people remember him as a singer. We used to have some good singalongs.

When I asked Philip what had happened since then, he expanded on his career:

I used to refer to you as just Ray, but out of respect switched to calling you Uncle Ray as everyone else seemingly did. You are a gentleman and accommodating towards everyone. We feel at ease with you. I remember when dealing with teenagers you showed them the same level of respect you did with your friends. You loved wearing a white shirt and tie. We have known each other for almost 60 years and every time I see you it's like being with family. I reckon you're the king of the local music scene. You are respected, admired and adored. You love helping people and, as far as Hong Kong's music industry is concerned, your legacy is forever assured.

When the original singer of Joseph Koo's band (Doris Lang, sister of Sandra Lang of The Chopsticks) left to study abroad, Joseph asked me if I would like to fill the role for the summer holidays. I was still a schoolboy, and this was a huge honour. My answer was obviously, 'Yes.'

Going to the clubs and ballrooms was expensive back then and only the well-to-do could afford it. The patrons were impeccably attired, and the single men came with escorts. However, these escorts were more interested in us, the boys of the nightclub. It made us distinctly uncomfortable to be viewed as sex objects. Besides, we all had our own girlfriends and didn't need any further distraction. At that time, I didn't see a future for my music career.



Singing from the same song list again and again at Savoy felt meaningless. As a result, I joined the Hong Kong Police Force after graduating from secondary school. In hindsight, I should have continued along the music path since the local music scene was soon to reshape itself and take off!

I recall Philip and his boy band, The Astro-Notes, entered a singing contest sponsored by Coca Cola in 1963. I was one of the judges. Competition was tough and they finished in fifth place. The winner was an extraordinary six-year-old girl by the name of Teresa Carpio, a diva in waiting if there ever was one. In 1963, Teresa was too small to reach the microphone! In the 1970s she was just about the hottest ticket in town.

Philip's involvement in the industry pre-dates the Playboys. He talked about when they first crossed paths:

I used to perform during the afternoon tea dance session at a venue called Jade Garden located on the twelfth floor of the old Astor Theatre where Mona Fong, who later became wife of Sir Run Run Shaw, also performed at night. Teddy Robin asked me if he and his band could take over the stage during my intermission. He explained they just wanted the opportunity to perform. That's how the Playboys started their stint at Jade Garden. They took over my slot after I moved to Bayside in the basement of Chungking Mansions. It's hard to imagine it now, but that building was then one of the more desirable residential properties in Hong Kong as it was one of the tallest and had a harbour view. Unfortunately, a major fire in 1966 destroyed several shops in the arcade – the apartments were on the higher floors – and the building began to lose its good reputation after that. Other well-known clubs with resident bands at the time were the Crown and the Golden Phoenix. This trend was one of the factors that gave birth to the Band Sound craze in the sixties.

As there was no Cross-Harbour Tunnel in the colony until 1970, we had to use the Yau Ma Tei vehicular ferry service to cross the harbour by car.

One day I bumped into Norman on the ferry. He was the lead guitarist of the Playboys, but teaching was his real profession. He said he didn't know whether to continue as a teacher or focus on his music career. I told him we don't need to just work for a single employer in our lifetime. 'Don't hide your talent!' I believed this short conversation helped him a lot. Norman Cheng's achievement in the music scene is phenomenal.

Philip entered the Hong Kong Police Force in 1965 and earned a reputation for courage and leadership. He handled several major crime cases, including Hong Kong's first ever armed bank robbery in 1974 in which eleven hostages were held at gunpoint. He even appeared as the 'Singing Inspector', promoting road safety on television. He resigned from the police in 1976 and returned to show business.

Philip Chan is multi-talented. When it comes to singing, I love his rendition of 'You Raise Me Up'.



Philip Chan and the Astro-Notes at Savoy, 1963.

## **Norman Cheng**

Having made a name for himself in the 1960s with the Playboys, when the popularity of Band Sound began to wane Norman Cheng joined the independent local record label Diamond Music Limited as a producer in 1970. We became close friends after the company was acquired by Polydor, where he stayed on as an executive. For most of the decade, Polydor operated as a subsidiary label after Phonogram took over and restructured to PolyGram Records. Nearly every workday morning, I parked my car at the KCC and walked to his office located in Garley Building on Nathan Road. This routine meant I frequently lunched with and built a relationship with the PolyGram management from the 1970s to the 1990s.

Norman is no stranger to Hong Kongers. He's the father of movie star and singer Ronald Cheng, but the older generation will still best remember him as the guitarist of the Playboys.

Teddy Robin spoke effusively about Norman's role in the Playboys:

Although, I was the lead singer, Norman Cheng was the band's beating heart; he was the person in charge. From song selection to arrangement, we all relied on him. Whenever we performed, Norman took care of everything – including writing that letter of introduction to you on our behalf. He was our leader.

Thanks to Norman's outstanding leadership, PolyGram turned into the dominant local music publisher. Norman rose through the ranks to become the managing director of PolyGram Hong Kong Limited and, later, the first Chinese managing director of PolyGram, Asia Pacific. He discovered stars like Teresa Teng, Leslie Cheung, Alan Tam, Sam Hui, Jacky Cheung, Faye Wong, Priscilla Chan and many others. In

1998, PolyGram was sold to Seagram and then merged with Universal. Norman started his own record company Gold Label in 2004 and sold it to Warner Brothers in 2010.

Norman thanked Teddy Robin for his kind words but reminded him that had he not been the lead singer the Playboys wouldn't have got where they did. Norman then said to me:

In those days I really enjoyed the lunches with you. First of all, you were the most popular disc jockey in town, and we all knew the value of a relationship between a record company and disc jockeys. We relied on them heavily to promote our artists, especially before the advent of the internet. Whenever international stars like Quincy Jones, Lionel Richie, Elton John and Diana Ross, among several others, travelled to Hong Kong, we would ask you if you would interview them. I fondly remember going to eat Peking duck with you and Quincy when he was here.

The mention of PolyGram brings up the big fire at Garley Building on 20 November 1996, a tragedy that killed dozens and left many more injured. I remember I was walking along Nathan Road that day. My eyes were fixated on a woman standing by a window ledge. She was on fire and desperately trying to escape. The next moment, she jumped and fell several storeys to her death. This is the most horrific thing I have ever witnessed in my life. PolyGram were lucky as they had just moved the bulk of the business to new premises before the fire happened, and only one studio was burnt.

Apart from music, Norman Cheng and I have a mutual love of horse racing. He still remembers the first time I brought him to the racecourse in Happy Valley:

We both love horse racing. I recall in my late teens we were at City Hall rehearsing for the *Lucky Dip* show. You weren't there for the rehearsal but walked in later grinning from ear to ear. Before we had the chance to say anything, you beckoned us outside, pointed at a new car and told us it was paid for by the Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club. We were stunned. Buying a car from horse racing winnings? We begged you to bring us along, but we were still too young.

You finally did take me horse racing, and the day after we attended the race meeting other band members excitedly showed me a photo in a newspaper of the two of us at the course. To me it was not a big deal. I didn't care about my



Caught by a reporter at Happy Valley Racecourse with Norman Cheng, 1969. Sourced from *The Star*.

personal image then, since I always had my back to the audience when performing onstage. It was my style.

Norman had well and truly been bitten by the horse racing bug and loved talking on the topic when with other enthusiasts:

I became immersed in horse racing. You introduced me to the world of racing, but I believe I became the more professionally involved. I have owned horses in the United States, Macau and Hong Kong since the late 1970s. I took you to the famous Santa Anita racecourse in Arcadia, California. I even helped you purchase your colt We Know When. The horse was entered in the 1997 Hong Kong Derby.

I have to thank Norman Cheng for his support over the past 50 years. Whenever I have major celebrations, he helps out in any way he can, sometimes to spectacular effect. For instance, imagine the elite of Hong Kong artists – The Wynners, Jacky Cheung, Leslie Cheung and most of the stars from PolyGram – all in attendance at one party. Yes, Norman (and RTHK) made that happen for my 70th birthday bash at the Regal Riverside Hotel in 1994.

Then in 2019 I was a member of the audience at the Ronald Cheng One More Time World Tour at the Hong Kong Coliseum. During his son's concert, Norman Cheng went up on the stage and thanked two people he considered had been very influential in his life. The first was the family amah who had helped raise Norman *and* Ronald – now a proud centenarian lady. The second was me. Norman said without us he would not have achieved what he had. I was deeply moved.

Norman mentioned one last thing at our get-together:



When Lily and I decided to marry, we organised a cocktail party at Inplace, the private club owned by my band in Happy Valley. I asked if you would kindly be godfather to our first child, and you graciously agreed. That baby was Ronald, born in March 1972 and baptised four months later. That's why Ronald respects you and calls you 'Godfather'.

For my combined 70th anniversary in broadcasting and 95th birthday party, held in 2019, Norman Cheng, Teddy Robin, Philip Chan, Christine Samson, Joe Junior, Albert Au, Danny Summer, Danny Tong, Tony Tsang and Maria Cordero all came for the celebrations. We have known each other for more than 50 years and remain the closest of friends.

I have to say again, 'Thank you very much for all the support. Let's do it again in 2024 when I turn a hundred.'



■ Backstage at Ronald Cheng's concert, Hong Kong Coliseum, 2019.

## Snapshots with Long-time Friends



Clockwise from me: Joe Junior, Danny Diaz, Christine Samson and Teddy Robin, KCC 2019.



Clockwise from me: Norman Cheng, Frederick Chan and Philip Chan, KCC 2019.

‘I first experienced Uncle’s generous support for the Hong Kong music scene when I emerged as a novice singer in my “college combo”, the Astro-Notes, back in 1961. Little did I realise that for the next 60 years years our friendship would age like a great vintage wine with our mutual respect and passion for music. Uncle Ray is the person I respect most for his life’s achievements, supporting stars and newcomers alike in the music scene and, above all, being a charming, gentle giant in our broadcasting industry. He is a true hero whom I’m forever proud to call my friend. This account of his long life and work is not only authoritative, but also moving and inspiring.’

*Philip Chan*

Actor and Businessman

‘Uncle Ray, Uncle Ray, your voice, your music, will always illuminate our way! We will always smile for Uncle Ray.’

*Lee Lung Kei*

Singer

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# THE FEALTY OF FAN CLUBS

**W**ITHOUT FANS, music is incomplete. Their spontaneity and zeal elevate mere listening pleasure to a complete sensory experience. One feeds off the other. There was no better representation of that effect in Hong Kong than the sixties.

The unbridled enthusiasm for pop music in the decade saw artists command a huge and sometimes rabid following. For the younger contingent, especially, belonging to a fan club was the highest form of adulation, and in the minds of its members added legitimacy to claims of true loyalty. In practice, these fan clubs were nothing more than loosely formed groups of teenagers with minimal organisational abilities, most of whom had neither seen their idols perform in concert nor met them in person.

Young listeners wrote to me regularly, some asking for guidance and others wanting my blessing to form a fan club. Many of them, though, purported to be president of one or more fan clubs, a somewhat cynical ploy to inflate their idols' popularity and have them earn top billing on my shows. I found it ridiculous that in extreme cases certain artists had dozens of fan club presidents. This scattered approach wasn't helping the cause of my younger base, however dedicated, sincere or otherwise they were. Urgent coordination was required.



Acting as a trusted intermediary between fans and artists, I announced a new arrangement. Eligibility was limited to one official fan club per singer or band and which would only then be ratified under three main conditions: it was for a professional artist; it was properly run; and it had an active membership scheme. I turned down many submissions on the grounds of age, a failure to convince of the intention to take club affairs seriously, or divided loyalty by seeking to add other favourite artists. Even so, I successfully registered more than 50 fan clubs.

My frequent interaction with young people through these fan clubs, earned me the title of ‘Hong Kong’s Oldest Teenager’. It’s a title I continue to claim!

## They love the ‘oldest teenager



● THESE girls a-go-go the afternoon away.

THEY call disc jockey Ray Cordeiro “Hong-kong’s oldest teenager” – but yesterday his fans



● RAY Cordeiro acts as a swinging Master of Ceremonies.

It’s official! Ray Cordeiro is the oldest teenager in town. Sourced from *Music Maker*.

# P A R T Y

## NEWS

### FOR FANS

Well, now that exams are over and you have a chance to let yourself go . . . enjoy your holiday, we are having two Fan Club parties . . . one in July and one in August!! As usual, a bonanza of surprises will be in store for you, so don't miss the opportunity!

PLACE: THE BAYSIDE REST. & NIGHTCLUB.  
DATE: TUESDAY - 25th JULY, 1967.  
TIME: 3.30 - 6.30 P.M.  
CHARGE: HK\$4.00 per ticket.

**NOTE:** Members may pick up their tickets (2) each member! (bring along your membership card and the required fee) on the following times and dates:  
JULY 13, 14, or 18, (from 2.30 - 5.00 p.m.)

PLACE: RADIO HONG KONG, Room 802, Mercury House.  
\*\*\*\*\*

SIDE EFFECTS

GUESTS

PLAYBOYS

JOE JR.

MYSTICS

TEDDY ROBIN

MIKE RENNISON

Double the fun! Invitation to back-to-back afternoon dance parties. The Official Ray Cordeiro Fan Club newsletter, Summer issue, 1967.

ROUNDUP — 3

## FAN PARTIES REALLY SWING!

### Says Sammy McKay (who went to one)

Six swinging pop groups, 500 lively teenagers, a good dance floor, coke and sandwiches — and a popular host.

These were the ingredients for an afternoon party at the Bayside Restaurant on Tuesday.

And what a swinging party it was!

McKay, himself a one-time pop star, presided over the party, which was held at the Bayside Restaurant on Tuesday.

Some members of the group centre their attention outside the field of entertainment.

One of the visitors here, the late Mrs. McKay, said that she had to leave a dinner.

Another visitor, a newspaper reporter, said: "Teddy Robin has a great and beautiful personality."

Report Chiu, director of the "Roundup", says he is a journalist.



\* Fans reach out for Teddy Robin.

**Screen to end all screams**



**IN EUROPE THESE TWO STARS MEAN THE HIGHEST QUALITY IN REFRIGERATORS. HITACHI HAS THEM. NOW LOOK WHAT HITACHI HAS THAT OTHERS HAVEN'T!**

**Automatically**  
THE REFRIGERATOR DEFROSTS at the touch of a button. There's no cleaning up whatever. Simple enough!

**Automatically**  
ICE CUBES FORM EVEN DURING DISMOUNTING. So that the quality never varies, the cubes during the defrosting operation just pull out. No fiddling, no fussing!

Fan parties was where it was really happening for teenagers in the 1960s. Sourced from Round Up.



While increasingly promoting itself to the world as a global hub for finance and trade, Hong Kong remained a place characterised by conservative tendencies in the sixties. The east meets west culture was spreading, but traditional Chinese family values, and the central tenet of filial piety, held sway. Not a major surprise, then, that western pop music and culture were deemed to be a bad influence, particularly by those who belonged to an older generation: it was too loud, too brash, too undignified. As is their wont, kids rebelled, defying their parents' wishes by jamming to tunes they were 'forbidden' from listening to and using any excuse to party as hard as they could. When the kids wrote to me, often to vent their frustrations, they used pseudonyms. Without excusing such behaviour, it still struck me as peculiar, if not misguided, that joining a fan club was frowned upon. Music as a shared experience can be a force for good – wherefore bringing young people together encourages social interaction, forges close bonds and helps them navigate the pitfalls of a vulnerable time in their lives. It's true some clubs were unruly, tarnishing the fan club image as a whole and adding



*Lucky Dip* audience members cover their faces in front of the camera, 1969.

to the level of distrust that already existed. But the notion that there might be some sinister subtext at play was well wide of the mark.

Diehard fans did get carried away. They thought it stylish to appropriate their idol's surname, and so I heard from the likes of Anna Chow McCartney and David Chan Sinatra. Others created monikers such as Dick The Beatles, The Bond Bond Brothers, and so forth. At best, it was gimmicky; at worst, it harmed the professionalism of the show and made me nervous that we might not be taken seriously. It was on that basis *From Me to You* was taken off the air for approximately three months in late 1967.

After that, I made the decision to ban the use of aliases on my show. You can be Peter, Paul or Mary, but don't change your family name:

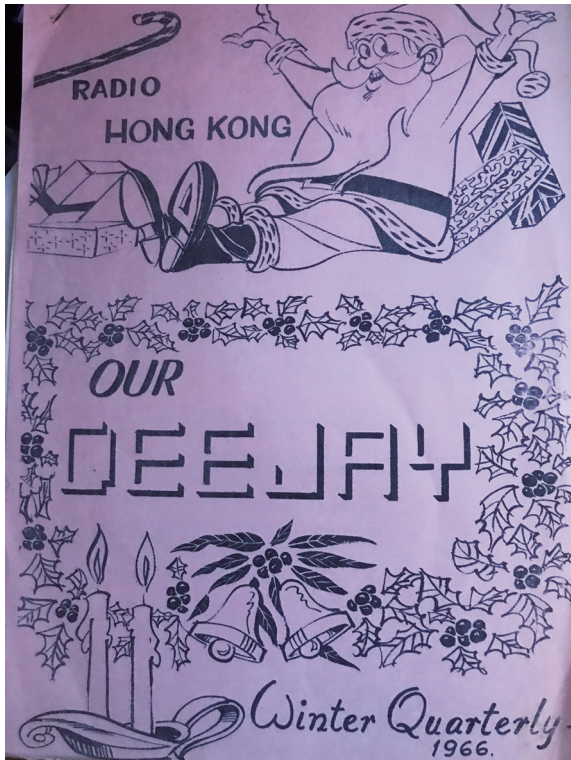
just be proud of who you are. I did wonder if I was treating my listeners too harshly. But I need not have worried; they complied without creating any fuss. The practice became commonplace thereafter among disc jockeys Hong Kong-wide.



My comments on fan clubs recorded in *The Star*, late 1960s.

## THE OFFICIAL RAY CORDEIRO FAN CLUB

One sunny afternoon in the early half of the sixties, Steve Chung and Stephen Yuen, two students from St. Paul's College, walked into my office at Mercury House. They pitched the idea of having my own fan club. I was extremely flattered by the proposal and they became my first fan club president and vice-president, respectively. At one point the Official Ray Cordeiro Fan Club had over a thousand active members.



■ Cover to an Official Ray Cordeiro Fan Club newsletter.

Radio Hong Kong funded most club-related activities. Free newsletters were issued quarterly, covering fan club topics and entertainment news, but in reality they mainly carried reprinted song

lyrics that members were crazy for. (In the sixties, most records didn't come with lyrics; you had to buy a lyric book for that.) Although the standard of English among my fan club editorial team was decent, putting out the quarterly still wasn't an easy task for them and I would lend a helping hand when I could.

There was a small Q&A section in the fan club newsletter. Teenagers often raised matters of the heart and so I felt like an agony aunt. I was happy to oblige though, because they deserved to have their trust in me repaid in kind. In the March 1966 edition, a letter was included from Alice, a girl living in Tai Po. She felt lonely but had a foreign boy pen friend, even speaking to him on the phone from time to time. Alice asked me how to approach the boy's invitation to meet in person. In my opinion, meeting new people is a positive thing. We are human and desire company. I told her she could even improve her English with her pen pal face to face. But I also reminded her that academic studies come first no matter how alone she felt.

There was a special perk for being my fan club member. Commencing 1 March 1966, a member's birthday would be announced on *Just for You* and I would dedicate a song of my choosing to the birthday boy or girl. The teenagers loved it.

We all looked forward to our regular meetups, otherwise known as the fan club dance party. The owner of the Bayside nightclub on Nathan Road was a good friend of mine and I managed to negotiate use of the venue on Saturday afternoons. A steady stream of live music got everyone dancing and there would be a lucky draw with Diamond Music Limited donating records for prizes. It was all great fun. The entrance fee was an affordable \$3–5.50, depending on the event, and included one drink as standard. Money collected was used to offset party expenses.

I treated fan club members as if they were family and made sure they were well looked after. It was important to me, too, that these kids conduct themselves in a proper manner. I talked about personal responsibility, the need to treat others kindly and offered advice on any issues brought up for discussion. I even instructed them on music etiquette. For example, an audience shall never jeer performers; they are here for your enjoyment and if you disrespect them, they'll stop coming. Finally, I also encouraged members to take part in community outreach programmes, like the Operation Santa Claus charity drive organised by RHK.

The penultimate president of my fan club was Timothy Wong. I asked him to share some of his fan club memories:

When I was the president of the fan club, I frequently visited your office with other committee members to liaise and handle administrative duties. You were always friendly, and we loved engaging with you. We would help with whatever was needed and you'd buy us snacks and refreshments.

When you were running in the most popular disc jockey poll, I used all my money – two Hong Kong dollars! – to buy 20 copies of *The Star* newspaper

**VARIETY SHOW  
A SUCCESS**

Radio Hongkong's Christmas Variety Show, held at the City Hall on December 18th drew a large crowd of local teenagers and gave them plenty to shout about.

Variety was the keyword with Folksongs, jazz numbers, A Go-Go hits, Mandarin songs and Chinese folk dances all featured in the programme.


Hong Kong's best known folksingers Dave Best, Len Porty, Nick Platt, John Collins and Dina Webster gave their usual spirited performance and the Willows, winners in the group section of the last Amateur Talent Quest, also gave the almost-packed house some old favourites such as "Mary's Boy Child" and "Rising of the Moon".

Catering for the 'Big Beat' lovers were Teddy Robin and the Playboys putting over four of their hit numbers. Their reception from the crowd was well deserved.

Radio Hongkong can be proud of this effort and we understand that over \$8,000 was raised for the needy children of Hong Kong. A fine effort by all concerned.

**FAN CLUB PARTY**

On the previous day the Official Ray Cordeiro Fan Club held



Ray Cordeiro named Top DJ of Hong Kong.

its 4th Xmas Party at the Bay-side Nightclub. Fans and friends of the popular Ray heard the Zouderackers, The Mystics, The Jade Set (formerly the Corsairs), D'Swooners and Teddy Robin and the Playboys played their hearts out giving the large turnout the music they love.

Local Record Companies, Diamond Music Co., Cosdel (H.K.) Ltd. and Jardines kindly donated many L.P.s and singles as door prizes.

The very lively afternoon resulted in a contribution of \$7,000 for "Operation Santa Claus".

My fan club Christmas Party raises HK\$7,000 for Operation Santa Claus, 1967. Sourced from *The Star*.



and beseeched friends and relatives to support you. I even filled out the forms on their behalf and posted them. Actually, all fan clubs did the same to support their idols during that period.

One of my best-remembered occasions occurred in 1965 when you had to jump into Victoria Harbour for charity. It was a thrill being there to cheer you on and have your acknowledgement of our support in return. Another highlight was when you dressed in a Santa costume. My father passed away when I was 16 and you treated me as a family member and guided me with humility and grace.

Tim left for the United States in 1970, but we have kept in touch. Both of us are big fans of Cliff Richard and Tim often sends me memorabilia. For the last ten years he and his wife, Clara, have made an annual trip back to Hong Kong and we meet up without fail every time. Most recently, they joined me in 2019 for my joint 70th anniversary in broadcasting and 95th birthday celebration. Tim has been my most loyal fan and we have maintained our friendship for more than 50 years, going back all the way to his school days. I will never forget the continuous support rendered by Tim and so many other members, not least Catherina So, the third and last president of my fan club. I love you all.

A SPECIAL MEMBER'S PRIVILEGE.

Commencing March 1st, a member's Birthday will be announced in Ray Cordeiro's Request Programmes and a song will be chosen by Ray and dedicated to the Birthday boy or girl. This is Ray's idea and we are sure you will appreciate it.

Well, that's all from us - so until our next Issue, happy listening and good luck in whatever you do.

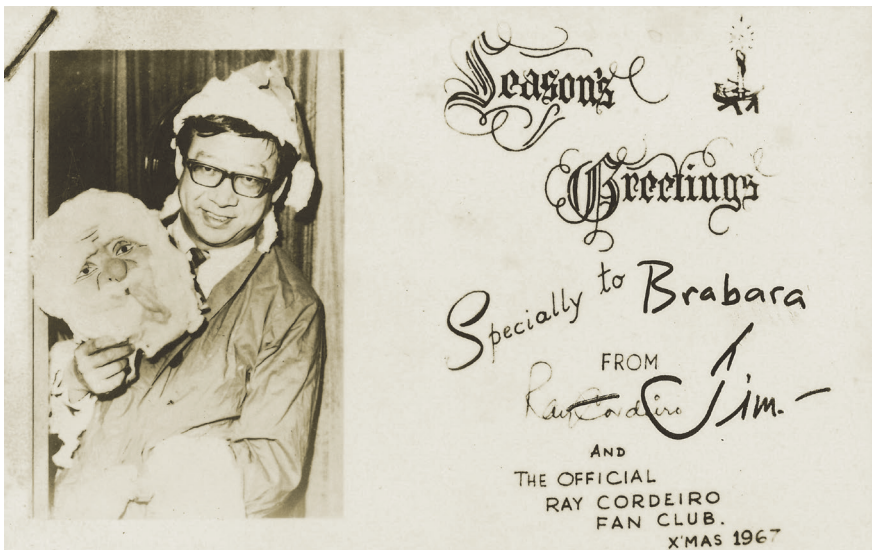
The Editor.

■ Announcing members' birthdays began 1 March 1966.





Catherina So, my last fan club president, gifted me this photograph together with the complete fan club file of news clippings in 1973.



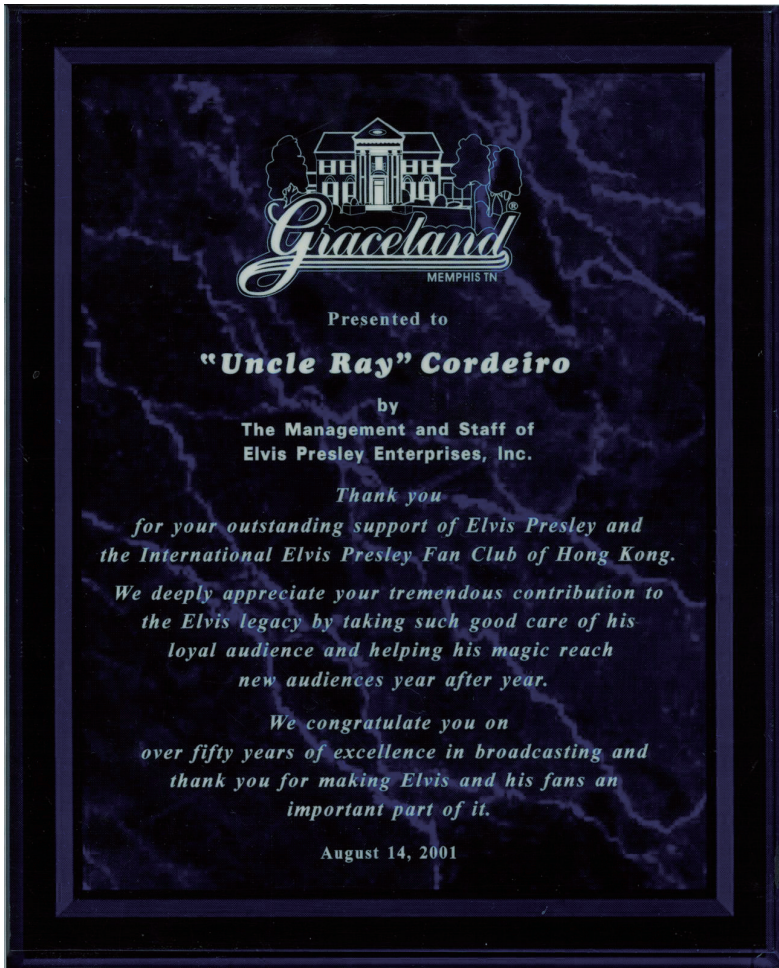
Official Ray Cordeiro Fan Club Christmas card, 1967.

## **I AM A FAN OF ELVIS PRESLEY**

I never got the chance to meet Elvis Presley, but I have been a patron of the International Elvis Presley Fan Club (Hong Kong) since 1968. The 'King' passed away on 16 August 1977, and by sheer coincidence I had played six of his ballads in a row on my radio show the night before. I was shocked and saddened when the news broke that he had died.

The Hong Kong fan club hosts major gatherings biannually to remember the King, on his birthday and the day of his death. Elvis had an undeniable magnetism that gained a crazed following. I loved him not only because he was a great vocalist but also for his stage presence and acting. As a long-standing fan, I have attended all the functions organised by the local fan club in the last 50-odd years.

On 16 August 2001, long-time Elvis collaborators and approximately 300 fan club representatives from around the world appeared at an official luncheon held at a Marriott hotel in Memphis, Tennessee, to mark the 24th anniversary of Elvis's death. I had been invited to this prestigious event to receive a plaque from Elvis Presley Enterprises for my continuous support of the King and the Hong Kong fan club. You can understand how elated I was when emcee Pat Anderson announced: 'The final recipient of this plaque this afternoon is from Hong Kong, known to everyone as Uncle Ray. He has supported Elvis on his daily show for over 30 years. He is also in the Guinness Book of World Records as "The World's Most Durable Radio DJ".' With that, I stepped onto the stage and kissed Pat on the cheek for the touching introduction. I went on to say, 'This is a very special honour for me because I received my MBE award from the Queen and now, I'm getting this lovely plaque in the King's honour.' Everyone stood up and applauded. Later at the celebratory function, people kept asking me for photographs.



■ My treasured Elvis memento. Graceland, 2001.

In Memphis, I had never seen so many Elvis impersonators in one place. They were proudly walking along Elvis Presley Boulevard in their costumes. There were also tribute acts performing all day long. I saw two Elvis jets, the *Lisa Marie* and *Hound Dog II*. Those present who wished to visit the Graceland mansion were given a candle for the midnight vigil. It was utterly glorious, 40,000 or so people had gathered from all over the world to honour one person, the King, Elvis

Presley. People started lining up hours in advance for the midnight vigil. When the moment arrived, all you could see was a mass of lit candles moving slowly towards Elvis's grave inside the garden on the side of the mansion.

Another exciting experience during my Graceland trip was the Elvis Presley Live Concert. Reuniting onstage in Elvis's hometown of Memphis after a world tour were key figures of his entourage in his heyday, including among many others: back-up vocal groups the Jordanaires and the Sweet Inspirations; lead guitarist Scottie Moore; saxophonist Boots Randolph; and drummer Ron Tutt. Elvis was projected on a giant screen in the centre of the stage.

We also went to Sun Studio on Union Avenue, where in July 1953 Elvis paid US\$3.98 to make his first recording of two songs, 'My Happiness' and 'That's When Your Heartache Begins'. There we saw his original drum set, the old-fashioned microphone he used, as well as early photos of himself, Carl Perkins, Roy Orbison, Jerry Lee Lewis and B.B. King – a veritable 'who's who' of great artists of the era.

Not to be missed also was Beale Street. Running parallel with Union Avenue for almost three kilometres from the mighty Mississippi River, this major downtown tourist attraction is of great significance in the history of blues music, for as far back as the 1860s many black travelling musicians performed there. Officially declared the 'Home of the Blues' by an act of Congress in the 1970s, the street is now lined with blues clubs and souvenir shops selling a great variety of Elvis merchandise. The street and its surrounding area also provide a venue for small outdoor concerts and music festivals.

Visiting Graceland was an experience of a lifetime. I would highly recommend any music lover, but especially Elvis fans, to make this pilgrimage.



## Snapshots with Fan Club Friends



Clara and Tim Wong (second president of my fan club) with me at the Riverside Ballroom, Regal Riverside Hotel, 2019.



Elvis Presley Fan Club (Hong Kong) committee members. From left: Elsa Yuen, Julia Lam, Regina Cheung, me, Helen Ma, Mabel Lee, Teresa Chow, Aron Young and Ken Chan, the Panda Hotel, Tsuen Wan, 2017.



Elvis Presley Fan Club (Hong Kong) committee members climb aboard *Lisa Marie*, 2001.



Long-time friends at my 70th anniversary in broadcasting and 95th birthday party, 2019.



‘Uncle Ray has been and will always be a major part of Hong Kong pop history and his love and dedication to its music and entertainment has made a major impact on many lives! Through all the changes in music down the years, he has touched many and inspired us to reach for the stars!

Uncle Ray’s bright light will shine far and wide.’

*Danny Diaz*  
Singer

‘Uncle Ray’s passion for music and professionalism in broadcasting are something from which we can all learn.’

*Alex Lee*  
Chinese Disc Jockey with RTHK Radio 2

## CHAPTER NINE

# MY KIND OF MUSIC

**T**HE FIRST 78 rpm single was released in 1901, 24 years after Thomas Edison invented the phonograph. From that point on, the availability of shellac and vinyl records revolutionised how music would be delivered to the masses.

One of my earliest memories of this was from the gramophone at our Johnston Road home and learning the ritual of operating it: first needing to wind it up fully (if you didn't, the record would stall mid-tune), securing a record on the turntable, releasing the manual brake lever to get the turntable spinning and then finally and carefully lowering the needle at the correct angle. The music would start up accompanied by a distinct crackling sound. The imperfections in sound quality, ironically, added to the charm of it all.

Music is the best companion. It stirs the soul, adds texture and tapestry to life – especially mine. Most people are inextricably bound to genres of music from the era they grew up in. For instance, big band dominated the world in the 1920s to 1940s. Later generations, in their time, were into rock and roll, pop rock and disco. What about me? Well, not to be trite, but I never limit myself, and get more excited by a song's melody and rhythm. In any case, as a disc jockey it is my responsibility to promote and encourage all forms of music. Determining what makes a song 'good' is highly personal and subjective. All that matters is that it

resonates with the listener in some way, whether it's the beat, harmony or lyrics. Each song has a story to tell.

## BIG BAND

A big band incorporates between ten and 20 musicians across four groups: trumpet, saxophone, trombone and a rhythm section. A vocalist can add value but isn't essential. Whereas jazz leans heavily on improvisation, the heart of big band lies in composition and arrangement. Bandleader and musician simpatico is of critical importance. Big band was tailor-made for social dance, especially the foxtrot and waltz. Then when jitterbug became popular in the late thirties, big band music swung into full force.



Vinyl set of my favourite big band leader and his Army Air Force Band, 1967.

I was in awe of Glenn Miller when I was young. He was revered for a clarinet and tenor sax-led melody with three additional saxophones on

harmony, producing a uniquely special sound. There was a brilliance and beauty in his music that drew strong emotions from his audiences, a reaction later tinged with nostalgia for what had been and was no more, especially as he had entertained so many during the war. 'Moonlight Serenade' and 'In the Mood' are among his finest masterpieces. At the age of 40, Glenn joined the United States Army, and after transferring to the Army Air Forces formed the US Army Air Force Band. Tragically, his musical genius was lost when his plane disappeared while flying across the English Channel on 15 December 1944.

There was also Ray Anthony, another distinguished American trumpeter and bandleader. When I interviewed him in 1967 at the Peninsula hotel in Hong Kong, I wasn't aware that he used to play with Glenn Miller. Ray was astounded when I told him I noticed Miller's influence in his music. He vividly remembered how excited he was when Glenn asked him to join his trumpet section. Racing to get into position on his first appearance with the band, he tripped and fell across the stage.

The big band era, also referred to as the swing era, focused on bandleaders in addition to musicians with an identifiable style. A helpful comparison is Artie Shaw and Benny Goodman. Both were outstanding bandleaders and clarinet musicians, but their styles differed. Benny's could be described as smooth and refined (probably in large part influenced by his classical music training), whereas Artie's was contemporary. People viewed Artie as the king of the clarinet and Benny as the king of swing. I contend both were mislabelled. Artie was the one who played real swing music; Benny's was closer to classical.

On the subject of the clarinet, I can't leave out Lobing Samson, also known as the 'King of Clarinet' locally and the 'Benny Goodman of China'. He was a prominent figure in the nightclub circuit in Shanghai,

a city during that time of colour and razzmatazz enticing musicians from around the world and earning it the nickname of ‘Hollywood of the East’. Following instability in China after the war, however, many band musicians and their families, including Lobing and my brother-in-law Benny Constantino, relocated to Hong Kong – and by doing so had to rebuild their lives and careers once more. Lobing and Benny were fortunate, in the sense that with an established reputation brought over from Shanghai they were able quickly to pick up where they left off. Their contribution to a thriving local music scene, along with fellow Filipino musicians who came down from Shanghai (and also their native Philippines), cannot be overstated. They helped set new musical standards in talent, professionalism and culture in Hong Kong in the fifties and sixties, all the while big bands proliferated at nightclubs, jazz clubs and private clubs.



Lobing Samson (in dark hat) and big band members transit en route to China. Kowloon train terminus, 1930s.

## ROCK AND ROLL

Rock and roll music hit the mainstream when Bill Haley and His Comets appeared on the scene in the fifties. Originating in the United States, rock and roll is a merger of country music and rhythm and blues. Bill, on vocals, guitar and double bass, was considered one of its pioneers. In 1955, the band's hit 'Rock Around the Clock' became a global phenomenon. Club goers eschewed heavily choreographed moves for self-expression.

When the younger and more charismatic Elvis Presley appeared on the scene, he soon stole the limelight and assumed the mantle of the 'King of Rock and Roll'. I'm a bona fide devotee of Elvis, although for authentic rock and roll I favour Bill. As a band leader of that era, I encouraged my band Ray Cordeiro and the Telstars to follow Bill's energetic style, especially at dance parties, because I loved his strong 'groove'.



My Telstars perform with me at the Hong Kong Country Club. Clockwise from left: Alex, Fernando and Daniel (Vieira brothers), me, Eric Fox (singer) and Ignatius Rosa, ca. 1960.



**JAZZ**

RHK Jazz Quartet. Clockwise from left: Len Tracy (trumpet), me (drums), Chris Hilton (bass guitar) and Johnny Herbert (guitar), 1970.

Improvisation is the main characteristic of jazz. Skilful artists infuse pieces with impromptu solos and catchy riffs. There are different forms of jazz, but what they have in common is a rhythmic energy that carries the emotions of the main performers, inspiring them to master a signature sound. Soloists have the freedom to indulge provided they adhere to the overall framework of the ensemble. Some people describe jazz as fine dining and pop music as fast food. There's no judgement from me – each has its own merits.

I enjoy the sense of freedom jazz imparts and how it allows musicians to evolve. No two performances are quite alike: the variances are a product of experience, mood and the given moment

itself. Among the soloists, I love the pianos of Oscar Peterson and André Previn; the saxophones of Scott Hamilton and Stan Getz; and the drums of Buddy Rich and Gene Krupa. In the vocalist field, I am drawn to Doris Day, Jo Stafford, Perry Como and Frank Sinatra. They were all jazz giants.

I remember I was in Los Angeles back in the 1980s and a friend drove us to the Lighthouse Café at Hermosa Beach, a revered American jazz club. It was my good luck to see both Stan Getz and Chet Baker performing together. Stan was a well-known tenor-sax soloist and Chet was an excellent trumpeter. A decade ago, I attended a jazz show headlined by Stacey Kent and her husband, Jim Tomlinson. I met them after the show. Jim was appreciative when I told him I saw Stan Getz's quality in his music. Jim told me he loves Stan's sound and follows his style.

If you haven't picked this up by now, jazz is one of my great loves. My very first radio show was called *Progressive Jazz* and I also was a member of the RHK Quartet from the late 1960s to early 1970s.

## **MY FAVOURITE INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS**

Radio was the main source of promotion for singers before the advent of the internet. This is a truism. More accurately, the two are co-dependent. Without artists there are no records to spin and no audience. Artists are my partners. I am blessed to have followed the careers of so many amazing acts. Aside from those I've previously mentioned, I wish to acknowledge others whom I respect and admire, and who have been a significant part of my life as a DJ. They, too, have contributed to the success of the Hong Kong music scene, as indeed they have internationally.

## Perry Como

People tend to cite Frank Sinatra as best of the veteran singers. For me, it's Perry Como, an idol of mine as a teenager. After becoming a disc jockey in 1949, I wrote to him asking for an autograph. To my delight, he sent me this signed photo. This was an early addition to my first-ever photo collection of music stars.



■ My autographed portrait of Perry Como, 1950.

Perry was a hairdresser when his talent was spotted by Freddie Carlone, a big band leader in the States, who offered him a job as a singer. Perry hesitated as the whole family relied on him for financial support. His father surprisingly encouraged him to give it a shot, subscribing to the maxim 'you won't know until you try'.

I held Perry in the highest esteem because of his impeccable vocal technique and the emotional connection he projected in his songs. His style was romantic, his words sentimental; he was a crooner.

The economic boom in post-war America had encouraged a more glamorous way of living. Perry's singing, and that of others like him, reflected the optimism and Hollywood-type fantasy that had imbued people's lives. Matt Monro told me people often thought he sounded like Frank Sinatra, when in reality he was more flattered to be compared to Perry Como, such was his admiration for the man. I wholeheartedly agree. Of his many great songs, 'If' and 'And I Love You So' are the standouts. To this day, these two songs are among the most requested on *All The Way With Ray*.

### **Quincy Jones**

Quincy is another music giant and a legend. Starting out as a trumpeter in the 1950s, he was best known as the producer of the 'King of Pop', Michael Jackson. Quincy received 28 Grammys, placing him second on the all-time list of Grammy winners.

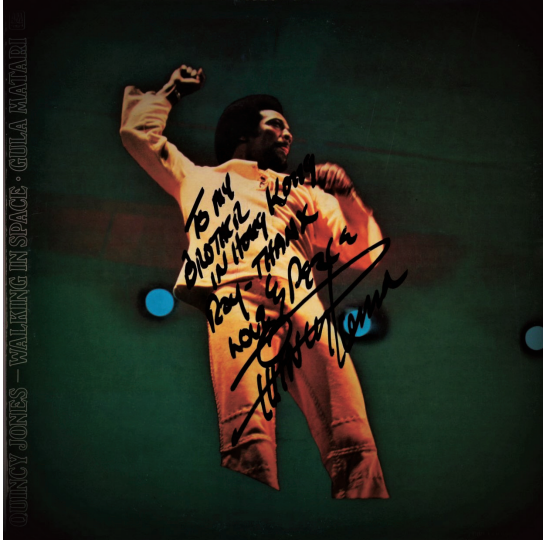
Our first encounter was in June 1973. Norman Cheng and I were waiting for him in the lobby of the Excelsior hotel in Causeway Bay. Quincy and his girlfriend Peggy Lipton came through the revolving door. When he saw me, Quincy pointed and said, 'Hey man, you look like my brother back home.' Apparently, I was the spitting image of one of his band members. Quincy told me he would inform his 'brother' in the States that he had a twin in Hong Kong.

I was puzzled when he called me 'brother', but then it struck me it was actually a term of affection. I was right, our interview was like old friends chatting. Before we left for a Peking duck dinner with Norman and Peggy, Quincy signed a record with a personal message: 'To my brother in Hong Kong, Ray – thanx. Love and peace, Quincy Jones.'

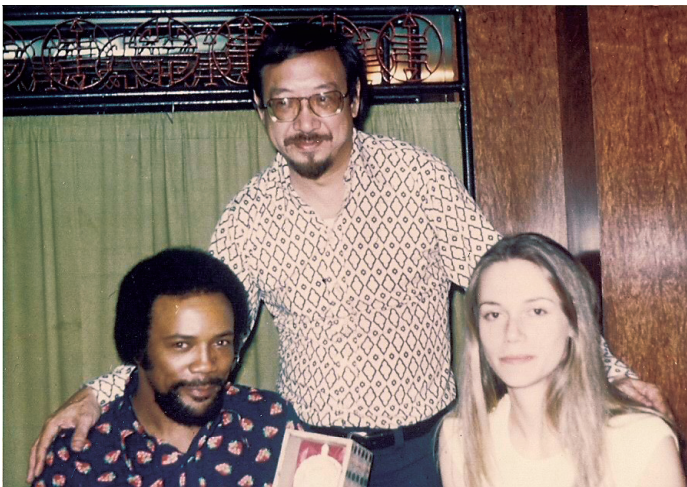
Quincy was also the producer of Lena Horne. When he was in Hong Kong again in 1981, he learnt that I was a fan of Lena's. He presented

me with four eight-inch reel-to-reel tape recordings of a jazz concert. I didn't know which specific concert recording I received, but one was released as *The Lady and Her Music* in 1981.

Thank you, 'brother'.



Quincy Jones album, personally signed in Hong Kong, June 1973.



Quincy Jones, me and Peggy Lipton at Peking House, 1973.



## Doris Day

Doris is without peer among female artists, in my opinion. I have cherished her extraordinary talent and silky voice ever since she was a big band singer in the 1940s. Besides, Doris was also a dog lover and a staunch advocate of animal welfare. It is a major regret I never got the chance to meet her in my career.

In 2011, at the age of 89, she released *My Heart*, which became a Top Ten album in the UK. You could feel that she poured her heart into every track and sounded as amazing as ever. Her songs can be frequently heard on my show. Her tracks ‘My Heart’, ‘Que Sera, Sera’ and her first hit ‘Sentimental Journey’ are my gold standards. When you listen to Doris, your heart will soar. She died in 2019.



■ Me and Doris's *Day by Day* album, 1988.



### **Sir Cliff Richard**

Cliff is one of my idols in pop music. I have followed him since his first hit 'Move It' was released in 1958. Cliff has a deserved reputation for being 'Mr. Nice Guy'. He was born in Lucknow, India, in October 1940 and moved to the UK in 1948 with his parents following Indian independence. He started his singing career in his teenage years. I am privileged to have met him on four occasions. The first time was in 1972 when he came to Hong Kong with the Shadows and Olivia Newton John for a couple of shows. Two years later, I interviewed him again at RHK. The third occasion was in 2003 when he appeared as the guest of honour at the station's 75th anniversary bash. That evening, I got the chance to sing 'Congratulations' with him. Our last meeting was in 2007 at a press conference held at the Regal Hong Kong Hotel in Causeway Bay for his concert at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre (HKCEC).



■ Interviewing Cliff at RTHK, 1974.

I invited Cliff to join my 88th birthday party in 2012. Unfortunately, he had a prior commitment and had to turn me down. Despite being 16 years my junior, there is no doubting his seniority in show business. I remember a Japanese female fan at the press conference at the Regal Hotel claiming that she had been a fan of Cliff since 1958.



■ A note from Cliff Richard, 2012.



■ Singing 'Congratulations'. RTHK 75th anniversary celebrations, 2003.

### Sir Elton John

My first meeting with Elton took place in his hotel room at the Peninsula in 1983. He was lying across a plush sofa. ‘Where would you like to do the interview?’ I asked.

‘Why not here?’ came his reply. Totally unassuming and no airs!



■ A relaxed Elton John in his room at the Peninsula hotel, 1983.

After the interview, we went to the Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club, as it was then, for dinner with Norman Cheng and Douglas Chan, the top brass at PolyGram. I was driving a gold-coloured Mercedes-Benz and Elton was sitting next to me. Norman and Douglas were driving their own cars in front. When we arrived at the Cross-Harbour Tunnel tollbooth I didn't stop my car because I thought they had paid for me. Chaos ensued. The electronic toll gate set off an alarm and all eyes were immediately upon us as we held up the traffic. The toll collector came out of his booth and strode to the car to tell me (in Cantonese, and clearly annoyed) that all drivers were required to pay individually. I handed over the cash. It was not my most ‘golden’ moment, especially with such a high-profile passenger sitting next to me! I explained to Elton what the problem was. He couldn't stop laughing,

saying it was the funniest thing to have happened on his trip, adding: ‘Do you have to make it so exciting for me?’

I last saw Elton in 2012 when he came for a concert. Radio Television Hong Kong had specially arranged for Elton to sign a birthday card for me. The ceremony was conducted at the venue just prior to his concert.



■ Me, Elton and Tai Kin Man, Deputy Director of RTHK, 2012.

## The Carpenters

‘Yesterday Once More’ is one of my favourite singalong numbers. As soon as I hear the opening line ‘When I was young...’ I break into song!

I met the Carpenters when they came to perform at the Lee Theatre on 31 May 1972. Karen told me she was inspired by a schoolmate and had been playing drums for six years. She agreed it was unusual for a girl to play drums but loved doing so especially when she was singing. It was just a natural thing for her. She even considered it an attention-grabber for the band.

Sadly, Karen died of anorexia nervosa in 1983 at age 32, but her songs are everlasting.

Although everybody was dazzled by Karen, I thought Richard, her brother, was the soul of the duo. He is a talented producer and composer, and a multi-instrumentalist who played backing music for Karen. Richard was inspired by Liberace on a television show in 1953 and took up the piano. He is also a jazz pianist and a fan of Oscar Peterson, Dave Brubeck and André Previn. Karen undoubtedly had a soothing, charming voice, but equal credit should be given to Richard for his contribution.



■ The Carpenters were one of my favourite bands in the 1970s.

## MY FLAGSHIP SHOW

In 1970 after returning from the Osaka Expo, I concentrated on my flagship late-night show, *All The Way With Ray*. It had started in the late 1960s and initially ran on weekdays from 11 p.m. to 1 a.m. on Radio 3 playing listener requests in the first hour followed by nostalgia. The rest of my shows I left in the capable hands of a talented young Australian disc jockey, Ashton Farley.

According to an article in the *China Mail* on 15 June 1971: 'Roughly speaking, 100,000 schoolchildren are sleeping late these nights... and



it's all Ray Cordeiro's fault.' I was delighted the teenagers didn't let me go. They even admitted to listening to the show in secret. However, despite their loyalty they gave me a lot of trouble by expecting the format of *All The Way With Ray* to follow that of my previous pop programmes. When they noticed I had changed the style of music on my late-night show, some complained that many of the songs were outdated, even writing to the press to air their grievances. They were not aware that the focus of my new programme was towards a more mature audience.

Taking to task the objections of one teenage correspondent who referred to Barbra Streisand as a 'second-rate artist', a faithful listener to *All The Way With Ray* later came to my support in the 'Readers' letters' page of the *China Mail*: 'Change your nappies, darling, your age is showing. In recent weeks Cordeiro has been the first disc jockey in town to play the latest albums by McCartney, Paul Simon, George Harrison, Steven Stills, the Eagles, the Carpenters, not to mention presenting a lengthy interview with Don McClean.' Obviously sarcastic in tone, the letter was signed The Cisco Kid. In the end, I gave way to these teens and allowed more pop to be played during the request session. After all, one of my responsibilities is to keep my listeners happy!

These irritations aside, I worried about the teenagers' health. After careful consideration, I did something I never thought would be necessary: reminding them to switch off the radio and turn in for the night as they had school the following day.

I still remember a loyal fan, Annie Yan, telling me some ten years ago, 'Uncle Ray, do you know how many teenagers had broken their radio receivers listening to you late at night? I broke at least five myself. Every time my radio was damaged, I needed to save breakfast money to buy a new one.'



I was really surprised and said, 'I heard about teenagers listening to me in secret in the seventies. But how did you break so many receivers?'

'A radio receiver was the best companion for teenagers in the 1970s,' Annie replied. 'We loved listening to your late-night show in bed and would turn the volume all the way down under the covers so that our parents couldn't hear. The trouble was when we fell asleep the tossing and turning would send the radios to the floor, damaging them. Those were the days!'

There was a notable problem working the late-night shift. I was literally a one-man operation, handling everything, including searching the record library. The duration of a sixties' song is normally less than three minutes and that meant to reach the library across the corridor I had to hustle. Juggling my duties, the last thing I needed was more hassle. Once, however, an Irish lady telephoned me during the show and launched into a tirade over something too trivial to recall. I hung up just before the midnight news and dashed to the record library, but on my way back I lost my balance and fell against some playback equipment. Blood poured from my forehead. I asked the control room to take over my show and left for the closest hospital. I got as far as the car park when I saw a woman standing at the entrance. It was the Irish lady who had argued with me. She felt so ashamed when she saw my condition, she offered to drive me to the British Military Hospital where her husband was a doctor. This ill-fated incident made it clear that I needed help, but it wasn't until the 1980s that I successfully lobbied for a programme assistant. My godson Andy Chow was one of them, and to this very day is there by my side ready to help out.

For a four-hour show, relying on a limited selection provided by the station wasn't going to work. So, I started borrowing from my own



■ My godson Andy Chow and me, December 2018.

collection. It was an annoyance having to transport vinyl and compact discs every day; the boot of my car was constantly full and the weight actually caused suspension damage. Five hundred or so of my own records ended up occupying a corner of the studio. Times change, though, and in 2000 I started to build my own MP3 library. It wasn't an easy task for an old man, but I wound up with around 100,000 songs in my database. Handling listeners' requests was a breeze from that point on.

In the early 1990s, I had lunch with Larry London from Metro Broadcast. Word mysteriously got back to RTHK that I was planning to defect. Cheung Man Yee, the then Director of Broadcasting (de facto head of RTHK) invited me to her office. 'I can't let you join Metro because you're too important to RTHK,' she said upfront.

'That's not the case at all,' I assured her.

She believed me but didn't want to take any chances.

'This is what I can offer you. I'll double your salary and authorise the broadcast of your show on both Radio 3 and Radio 4, from 10 p.m. to 2 a.m. and midnight to 2 a.m., respectively,' she said.



■ My personal mini record library at the RTHK studio.

It was an exceedingly generous offer, going against RTHK's policy of rarely renegotiating a freelancer's salary. I was pleased, to say the least. Not only was I going to be earning twice as much as before, I also would be gaining an audience on the FM frequency (Radio 4) for the first time in my broadcasting career. Sadly, the FM broadcast was reduced from two hours to one following my open-heart surgery in 2010 and ended altogether a few years ago when the decision was taken to replace it with the BBC news.

Fortuitously, the internet has also turned out to be a terrific boon for my show, allowing me to reconnect with fans long gone from Hong Kong and to welcome new listeners from all corners of the globe. One evening, I received a phone call live on my programme from Scotland – an old fan who used to work, as I had done, at Stanley Prison many moons ago. Then there are recent converts who have never resided in Hong Kong: Oleg Dmitriev, tuning in at the office in Moscow with his colleagues; Keith Gilroy in the United States; Peter Chiu in Barcelona, and many more. Indeed, whether people are listening in Britain while taking afternoon tea or on the way to work in Canada, the one thing

they have in common is revelling in my selection of old-time music. It is a glorious thing.

I am lucky in my life to be able to marry passion with work. Nowadays I spend an hour or so after a late lunch preparing the playlist for *All The Way With Ray*. In past years, the routine was considerably more time consuming, although I do miss the joy of thumbing through vinyl. For the rest of the afternoon, I listen to music in my massage chair with my dog Bo Bo beside me sharing in the relaxing ritual. At night, I travel a short distance to the studio for the latest instalment of my long-running show. Beginning in the millennium, I now kick off every show with songs from my all-time top three favourite artists: Elvis, Cliff and the Beatles. As usual, the audience and I will be fully immersed in the music.



My Fair Lady, Bo Bo, eight years old, 2021.

‘Uncle Ray: Radio Hall of Fame entity below Lion Rock.’

*Raymond Ng*

Former Deputy Director of Broadcasting

‘Godfather of the Hong Kong music scene.’

*Luke Tsang*

Media Personality

## CHAPTER TEN

# AWARDS, HONOURS AND FARCE

**T**HE CHOICES we make can mould our future in profound ways. My life is defined by the decision to pledge myself to the world of music and then to forge a career as a disc jockey. I could never have anticipated the recognition that came my way.



My Guinness World Record, since 2000.



## TOP DISC JOCKEY POLL, 1965

The sixties saw the dawn of a local pop culture. A free-to-air television service wasn't available until November 1967, so music artists depended on radio stations to gain traction. In other words, disc jockeys held sway. We had the ability to ignite a career virtually of our own accord. Satisfying listeners was just as important, if not more so.

In 1965, *The Star*, an English newspaper focusing on entertainment in Hong Kong, held the inaugural 'Top Hong Kong Disc Jockey' competition (English speaking). I polled 512 votes, a modest total but enough to be crowned the first winner of the title. I remained unbeaten in 1966, 1968 and 1969 with 1,494, 4,661 and 5,475 votes, respectively. (There was no poll conducted in 1967 owing to widespread social unrest across the colony.) The accolade meant a lot to me. To have my efforts acknowledged by fans was incredibly flattering, but it also served as a constant reminder that I had to continue to give of my best. It's a responsibility I take just as seriously today at the age of 96 as I did at any other time in my career.



Four-time winner of the Top Hong Kong Disc Jockey poll, 1965, 1966, 1968 and 1969.

One celebrity who offered me her support in the 1969 poll was Lydia Shum, the popular comedienne and emcee. Known affectionately as Fei-fei (Fatty) to her fans, Lydia had made her film debut in 1960 at Shaw Brothers at the age of 15, and in 1967 she shot to fame with the TV show *Enjoy Yourself Tonight*. I knew Lydia well. She and her best friend, the late movie star Alan Tang, used to join me frequently at Bayside. We were together there so much we called ourselves the Night-time Trio. We were all crazy about rock and roll, and despite her size Lydia was an excellent dancer. She could also sing, and in the early 1970s she teamed up with Roman Tam for two years. I couldn't have asked for a better ally to have on my campaign trail! Sadly, Lydia died in 2008, aged 62. She was a sad loss to the entertainment world.



Lydia Shum lends her trademark smile to my polling campaign, 1969. Sourced from *The Star*.

## GOVERNMENT RETIREMENT, 1980

In appreciation of my career's work and to mark my retirement from the Hong Kong government, industry players took out a 16-page supplement ('*The Sun* and Friends Pay Tribute to Ray Cordeiro') in Britain's *The Sun* newspaper on 19 July 1980. Six weeks later, on 31 August, RTHK held a sixties-themed concert at the Academic Community Hall at Baptist University to acknowledge the same.

As a civil servant, I could in those days apply for an extension every two years past the standard retirement age of 55, subject to a mandatory medical check-up and approval from the department head. I turned 55 in 1979, and there was no reason to doubt the two-year extension period would be granted. So, when I learnt from my doctor friend at the medical that my immediate boss, Ken Warburton, had signed off for only another twelve months, I was beyond furious. A faithful staffer to the station for 20 years was having his fate determined by a recently appointed expatriate on secondment from the BBC in London. I immediately returned to the station to give Ken a piece of my mind and to withdraw my application. Ken was stunned. It was an unfortunate example of how Hong Kong people were sometimes unfairly marginalised in the colonial era.

As I was left pondering my future, Warren Rooke, who was then head of the English news department and aware of what had happened, suggested that I could continue my programme as a freelancer. I love my job and this revised arrangement was the ideal solution. Terms were quickly agreed, and after some due leave I returned to host the RTHK countdown on 31 December 1979. I was concerned that my 'retirement' would affect my pension, but things turned out in my favour because later on I qualified for a lifetime pension on top of

my freelance salary. It's been 40 years since my retirement and I still receive two payments a month. Instead of cursing Ken, I ought to thank him!



RAY CORDEIRO SUPPLEMENT Page 1 The SUN Saturday July 19, 1980, Page 5

WE ALL HAVE THE SAME  
**UNCLE RAY**  
'A MAN OF ALL SEASONS'

80  
70  
60

... IN OTHER WORDS,  
WE HAVE THE **Biggest**,  
**Brightest** FAMILY IN TOWN.

**polyGram**  
POLYGRAM RECORDS LIMITED

Following Artists, recorded under Discworld Label

The Polaris Echoes  
Maurice Elmer  
Carmen  
The Sonolites  
Marty Payne  
Tony Mingo  
Pollyanna Post  
Tony Kin Chan  
Penny Ho  
Danny Chin and the Chandeliers  
Kenny Ho and the Playboys  
Tony & the Siskies  
The Kings  
Summit Hill & the Larks  
Kiki Chan  
The Chinese  
Marty Payne  
Kenny Ho and the Playboys  
The Messia  
Mad Eye  
Marty Payne  
Marty Payne  
and many others

THIRTYONE THIRTYONE THIRTYONE THIRTYONE THIRTYONE THIRTYONE THIRTYONE THIRTYONE THIRTYONE THIRTYONE

*We salute Ray,  
OUR Uncle of uncles*

**NEW  
GENERATION**  
青春交響曲  
RTHK RADIO TELEVISION HONG KONG  
香港電台

The SUN Saturday July 19, 1980, Page 17.

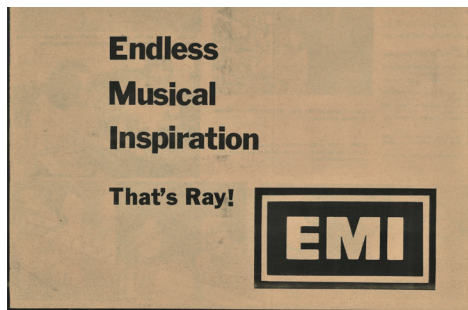
**Everyone  
has  
a favorite  
uncle.**

**Ours is  
UNCLE RAY.**

from the whole family at  
**HK-TVBS**

The cover of *The Sun* supplement and tributes kindly placed by leading music companies in Hong Kong, which also included RTV and Capital Artists, July 1980. Sourced from *The Sun*.





Sam Hui and Albert Au present a replica gramophone to me at the Academic Community Hall, August 1980.

## **MBE AWARD, 1987**

When I learnt in 1987 that I would be awarded with an MBE I was cock-a-hoop. Cheung Man Yee had nominated me. ‘Uncle Ray is an Institution in Hong Kong. If there are a hundred things connected with Hong Kong, Uncle Ray is one of them,’ she has since kindly said of me.

I had received notification of my award one month before the official announcement was made and had been given instructions not to disclose the details to anybody. The one-month period was needed for Buckingham Palace to ratify the Honours List. Having to keep the news to myself, unable to share it with my listeners, colleagues and even family members, was horrendous.

When the news finally broke across major media outlets, there was considerable fanfare. I was interviewed by fellow presenter Michael Leung on his Radio 2 morning show and then by reporters from various newspapers. Hearty congratulations poured in from friends and people from all walks of life. A celebration party was organised by RTHK at the Shangri-La Hotel in Kowloon in July 1987.

I was informed by the Hong Kong government that I had the option of receiving my MBE insignia from Governor Sir David Clive Wilson at a ceremony held in Hong Kong, or at an investiture at Buckingham Palace. I decided to travel to the UK and my attendance was confirmed for 11 November 1987.

Before setting off, I had to provide a UK correspondence address. My old mate Tony Myatt offered to put me up for the duration of my stay and kept me apprised of all communiques from Buckingham Palace, including the need to secure a special parking permit. Additionally, I had to rent proper attire for the ceremony, including a top hat and tails, formal shirt and tie.





■ We want champagne! Me (holding the champagne) and Albert Au at my MBE party. Shangri-La Hotel, 1987.



■ Swept off my feet – literally!

Each award recipient was allowed to bring two guests and I chose to invite Tony and his wife, Marlini. When he announced his forthcoming appearance at Buckingham Palace on his radio show, listeners mistook it to mean he would be receiving an MBE award and sent their well wishes. A sheepish Tony had to clear up the confusion.

On the big day, Tony and his wife chauffeured me, the VIP in the back seat. Dozens of London's famous bobbies were directing traffic in the cordoned off area around Buckingham Palace. Only vehicles with the designated parking permit were allowed access. The first policeman we approached leant forward and said to Tony, 'Please drop the recipient off at the main entrance and then drive your car to the waiting area until the ceremony is finished.' A miffed Tony said, 'I'm the guest of the recipient.' The policeman apologised and let him through to the guest carpark. We all had a good laugh.

As we entered the grounds at Buckingham Palace, a member of the Queen's Guard stopped me to attach a hook on my lapel where the decoration would be pinned. We were then ushered into a red-carpeted hall where 150 or so people had gathered for the big occasion. Up to this point we still had no idea who would be presenting the award. The duty was rotated between the Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh, the Prince of Wales and the Queen Mother. The Lord Chamberlain, to my recollection, then appeared and in a booming voice announced: 'May I have your attention, Ladies and Gentlemen. This is what you must do before you come face to face with Her Majesty The Queen.' Only then did we know the Queen would present us the medallion. The Lord Chamberlain continued: 'Recipients shall enter the Ballroom in an orderly fashion and then form separate lines. When your name is called, please walk forwards until you are standing in front of Her Majesty. Remember, you are not allowed to say anything unless The Queen speaks to you.'

There was a military band playing waltz music in the ballroom. My turn came and when I faced Her Majesty, she took a step towards me and asked, ‘What do you do to be here?’

‘I’m a disc jockey with Radio Television Hong Kong, Your Majesty,’ I replied.

She said, ‘Oh, I was in Hong Kong two months ago. Well done and congratulations.’

With those words, she pinned the MBE medal and smiled. I bowed, retreated three paces, turned right and walked out of the ballroom. At the exit, a gentleman presented me with a red case for the medal. Photographs were taken outside in the quadrangle.

This was a once-in-a-lifetime experience I will cherish forever.



In my morning suit and wearing my MBE medal, November 1987.



With Tony Myatt outside Buckingham Palace, 1987.

## **70<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY BASH, 1994**

I love to party. Every December, friends and relatives assemble for my birthday soiree, the scale of which got bigger and more extravagant with each passing year. I still remember the occasion the stars presented me with a gift in a beautifully wrapped giant box. When I 'opened' it, then popular solo artist Irene Ryder jumped out.

What ended up being one of the biggest events anywhere in Hong Kong in 1994 began at a Platters concert at the HKCEC. Cheung Man Yee was sitting next to me in the front row. She casually mentioned that RTHK would be pleased to organise a special celebration for my upcoming 70th birthday. What a delightful gesture! A week later, I received a phone call from Clarence Yeung Kut Sai, a producer at Radio 2, telling me he was assigned to produce my birthday extravaganza. The venue was the Riverside Ballroom in the Regal Riverside Hotel. One of our meetings was about artists to be invited. I hoped to entice 'A'-listers: the Wynners, Jacky Cheung, Leslie Cheung, Andy Lau, Roman Tam, Albert Au, Teddy Robin and the Playboys, Joe Junior, Danny Diaz, the Samson Sisters, Irene Ryder, Peric Lee, and others. All accepted.

Finally, the day came. Staff dressed in traditional Chinese costume greeted people at the reception. There were 300 guests who all were keen to take a picture with me. It was tiring but seeing so many happy faces made it worthwhile. What meant the most to me, though, was having my sisters Frida and Olga and their families there. Any celebration would be incomplete to me without family members present.

The Wynners opened the show and the response was immediate: everyone kicked up their heels. The Wynners were on stage for most of the evening, and many of the stars just grabbed a microphone to join



in and sing. Well aware of my love for the Beatles, the band regaled us with a set of classic Fab Four tunes including ‘All My Loving’, ‘Can’t Buy Me Love’, ‘Eight Days a Week’, ‘Yellow Submarine’ and ‘She Loves You’. Jacky Cheung, Roman Tam, Albert Au, and Teddy Robin and the Playboys and others followed up. Even though not all artists performed, I nonetheless valued their attendance. The evening was a roaring success greatly enjoyed by all.

Once again, I have to thank everybody from the bottom of my heart for making this memorable event happen.



■ Grand reception, the Regal Riverside Ballroom, 1994.



■ With Miss Cheung Man Yee, then Director of Broadcasting.

## LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD, 1997



With Chung Wai Ming at the Lifetime Achievement Award ceremony, Peninsula hotel, 1997.

The 70th anniversary of RTHK was in 1997. The station decided to bestow a Lifetime Achievement Award on me and colleague Chung Wai Ming, known locally as the ‘King of Broadcasting’. This was all made the more meaningful by the fact it had been arranged to be presented by Paul Anka, one of my favourite singers, who was due in town for a concert.

To build up the anticipation of Paul’s imminent arrival in Hong Kong, a recorded interview I had conducted with him over the phone a few days earlier was broadcast on *All The Way With Ray*. In the interview, Paul shared his music journey, which began in the mid-1950s. He also told me he would bring along his new tribute album to Frank Sinatra. True to his word, Paul gifted me the compact disc at the Hong Kong press conference.

The presentation of the award took place at the Peninsula hotel. It was a genuine surprise when Paul stepped up to the microphone and started singing his all-time classic ‘My Way’ but tweaked specially for the occasion. He included the recipients’ names in his song.



It was incredibly touching that Paul took the time and effort to rewrite the lyrics because he wanted to congratulate me and Wai Ming. When I think back, I can still hear his silvery voice: ‘Yes, to Ray Cordeiro’.

And he even joked he wouldn’t charge us royalty!

The last verse of the personalised lyrics to ‘My Way’ was:

Yes, to Ray Cordeiro...

My thanks for playing the songs I sing

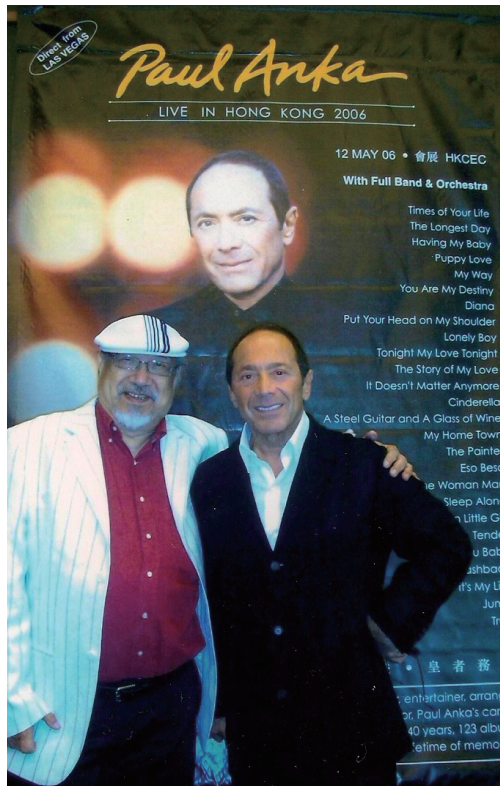
In times of change, it’s nice to know

We can depend upon your show

To stay in touch

Thank you, guys, so much

For sharing your show



Paul’s concert press conference, 2006.

Paul was a class act at his concert. Mid-way through, he walked over to where I was seated in the third row in my white cap and pointed me out to the audience saying, 'Hong Kong's favourite Uncle, Uncle Ray is here tonight.' I stood to embrace Paul, before turning to acknowledge the hollering crowd.

Paul has been in show business for more than 60 years. He knows what the fans want, and he delivers. Paul told me he enjoys close contact with a live audience. I last saw him for his 'Paul Anka Live in Hong Kong 2006' at the HKCEC.

### **REUNIFICATION CONCERT, 1997**

Hong Kong Island was ceded permanently to Britain in 1842 after the First Opium War and became the Crown Colony of Hong Kong in 1843. Following the Second Opium War in 1860, China was further forced to relinquish all of the Kowloon Peninsula. Finally, Britain secured a 99-year rent-free lease on the New Territories in 1898, enlarging the physical area of the crown colony considerably. This lease therefore ran out in 1997, and without the New Territories the continuation of the Crown Colony of Hong Kong was considered untenable.

In 1982, London and Beijing began the difficult process of negotiating the handover of Hong Kong back to China. Two years later, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Premier Zhao Ziyang signed the Joint Declaration. The Chinese pledged to govern under the principle of 'one country, two systems'. The newly designated Hong Kong Special Administrative Region would enjoy a high degree of autonomy, except in foreign affairs and defence, unchanged for the next 50 years through 2047.

The historic date of the handover and the end of British rule in Hong Kong was 1 July 1997. It was moving to witness the lowering of the Union Jack and the raising of the National Flag of the People's Republic of China in the presence of dignitaries standing at attention, some overcome with emotion.

To mark the momentous occasion, there were ten days of musical celebration at the Hong Kong Coliseum. I was approached by an official from the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress in April 1997 to produce one of the concerts, and the date was set for 7 July. With little time on my hands, I rallied friends and extensive contacts in the music industry, past and present, and ended up mounting a show featuring a dazzling array of local talent. The participants, no matter how far away they resided, all answered my call, ready at a moment's notice to contribute.

The sixties revival concert was a giant party for the 10,000 people lucky to attend. Danny Diaz and the Checkmates performed together for the first time in 18 years but as if they had never been apart. Teddy Robin and the Playboys were of course involved, and so too Norman Cheng and Frederick Chan. Also gracing the stage were the Wynners, the original D'Topnotes, Joe Junior, Irene Ryder, Joe Chen, Philip Chan, Albert Au, Eliza Chan, Ricky Hui and Ricky Fung.

The surprise act of the evening was Elvis Presley impersonator extraordinaire Peric Lee, a doctor by profession. An announcement on the public address system that 'Elvis' was in attendance was met with initial confusion followed by an awkward silence in the audience. The band then started playing the intro to 'Are you Lonesome Tonight' and Peric appeared in his full Elvis outfit from a rising platform below centre stage. That sent the whole place into raptures. Nobody had heard of Peric Lee, but he proved to be a major hit. I was very proud of the production and delighted with the crowd's reaction.

The show predictably overran its allotted time. The Wynners didn't close out the show until just past midnight as the audience flocked to the front of the stage and danced along. The concert finally ended at 12.35 a.m., which earned the organisers a fine of \$150,000 from the Coliseum management for breaching time restrictions. Performers left with souvenirs, the reunification of Hong Kong with China a joyous celebration for them as well. It was a night to remember and I was glad to have played my part.



■ The sixties revival reunification concert at the Hong Kong Coliseum, 8 July 1997.

## **GUINNESS WORLD RECORDS AWARD, 2000**

It was a tremendous honour to be recognised in 2000 as 'The World's Most Durable Radio DJ' by The Guinness Book of Records, as it was then known. This was after 51 years at the time, and still counting. However, it didn't come easy.



Kwong Kei Chi, then secretary of Information and Technology and Broadcasting, presents me with my Guinness certificate, 2000.

When RTHK applied for this honour on my behalf, I was asked to produce proof of when I had first joined Rediffusion. It was extremely difficult because Rediffusion had been sold to another outfit and its headquarters in London had lost or misplaced a lot of documentation. Fortunately, the former executive secretary, Leonora Horne, was willing to write me a letter of certification. That aside, I had to send off newspaper clippings of my days, first with Rediffusion and then RTHK. I kept waiting to hear back, but nothing happened.

A departmental secretary at the station was point person. When he went on leave, Jagjit Dillon filled in for him. I inquired about the status of my application. Dillon discovered it lying untouched on his colleague's desk, but he said not to worry he would take care of things for me. The application was processed and after a lengthy review Guinness finally granted me the title of 'The World's Most Durable Radio DJ'.



When the departmental secretary returned and discovered that everything had been handled, he ludicrously reprimanded Dillon. On top of that, when I was presented with the Guinness certificate during the station's annual Chinese New Year celebration in 2000, he was there. He kept telling people Alistair Cooke (not the *Letter from America* Alistair Cooke but a Hong Kong namesake) had been in the business longer in Hong Kong and, in any case, I began my career as a scriptwriter, not a disc jockey. I couldn't believe a man in his position could be so brazen without checking the facts. For starters, Alistair only hosted a 15-minute weekly talk show on RHK and wasn't a disc jockey. Secondly, his claim that I started as a scriptwriter was true but verifying the details would have revealed my own show *Progressive Jazz* started just two months after I joined Rediffusion.

I didn't much care for all these petty allegations and jibes. Notwithstanding that the man was my boss, the underhanded way that he went about this whole sorry episode did himself no favours.

And, I am still creating a new world record every day!



My grandniece Deanne shares my happiness in being a World Record Holder, 2000.



## GODFATHER OF POP, 2004, AND MY FRIENDSHIP WITH MONA FONG

*Can't you see I love you, please don't break my heart in two...*

– opening lyrics to ‘Wooden Heart’.



News cutting, 1979. Source not identified.

People in Hong Kong affectionately call me Uncle Ray for mentoring and supporting young music artists in the 1960s. These artists continued to contribute to the success of the local music scene over the following decades. In 1979, I was bestowed the title ‘Godfather of Pop’ (樂壇教父) by an English paper in Hong Kong. The honour was reaffirmed by TVB in 2004 and it caught on to be used by local fans.

The honour arose from when Mona Fong, the chairlady of TVB, saw my television commercial advertising the One Million Credit Limit lucky draw campaign for the first anniversary of the company where my godson Andy was the general manager. Believing that I had the chops for television, on both a personal and professional level, she

rang and invited me to host a new TV talk show interviewing pop stars. Although I had never been a TV host before, I accepted the offer because it was Mona who asked. She wasn't somebody you said 'No' to. Details were finalised in a meeting with Stephen Chan, the then general manager of TVB, at the KCC.

After wrapping up the series, Mona and I went to dinner at the Mandarin Oriental. The food was decent but the music a bit too loud, so we left early and wandered through Central. It was a quiet night and holding hands we strolled down Wyndham Street caught up in the wistful contemplation of two old friends: I was 80, Mona a decade younger.

When I met Mona in the 1950s, she was already a top-earning nightclub act and one of the few local singers who could do real justice to western numbers. Noted for her deep soulful voice, she was dubbed the 'Patti Page of Hong Kong'. When added to her glamour and natural charisma, it produced an intoxicating mix that cast a spell on whomever she was around.



■ Mona Fong at a function to support my softball team, the Giants.

Mona owned a pink convertible with the licence plate number 30 (the Chinese consider it an auspicious number) when she was living in Tsim Sha Tsui in the 1950s. She offered its use to me whenever she travelled abroad to perform. She was also very much the socialite back then. One year in the late 1950s, Mona chartered a Yaumati Ferry Company's vehicular ferry for her birthday celebration. My band Telstars played on board and she was on lead.

The band enjoyed going to Repulse Bay, one of the most picturesque parts of Hong Kong Island, for rehearsals and to hang out. Mona would join us whenever she was free. Afterwards, just the two of us would stroll along the beach. When the weather was at its best, we would soak in the gorgeous scenery of soft white sands against a backdrop of aqua seas shimmering below a clear sapphire sky. Mona's hair would billow in the salty-air breeze. Come sunset, I enjoyed playing the harmonica for her.

In that age it was uncommon for Chinese and Caucasians to fraternise. People were generally conservative anyway. We came together foremost out of a deep love for music, but also because she could lean on me to help polish her English vocal skills. Mona would periodically appear as a special guest for my band. She was highly motivated and constantly endeavoured to improve herself. I felt blessed that a beautiful leading nightclub singer in her twenties wanted to share her time with me. Was romance stirring?

Yes, the mutual affection was palpable, and we sought out each other's company whenever possible. However, there was a reluctance to take things further. We respected the bonds of our relationship and neither of us wanted to jeopardise that. We were two parallel lines, close and following the same trajectory but never destined to intersect.



Mona Fong and the Telstars perform on the Yaumati vehicular ferry, 1957. Clockwise from centre: Mona Fong, me, Daniel Vieira, Carlos Castilho and Affie Rosa.

When Sir Run Run Shaw, a local entertainment tycoon, entered Mona's life as suitor, the writing was on the wall. Mona was quite well off even when she was young, but she was enthralled by Sir Run Run's entrepreneurial spirit, business acumen and myriad achievements in film and television production. Deep down I knew I couldn't compete; Run Run had the means to fulfil her desires in a way I never could. As they say, 'If you love someone, let them go.' I told Mona we would remain close friends no matter what. It wasn't remotely surprising that with Run Run's backing, but mostly under her own steam, she became the chairlady of TVB.

One day, Mona showed me her office at Shaw Brothers in Clear Water Bay. Though she had pivoted to TV and film production, it was predictable that she had equipped the function room with a state-of-the-art sound system. It was a sanctuary that permitted her to indulge in her true love of singing.

Our friendship, however, never wavered. Mona would frequently make time to attend my major celebrations, and present a pen set as

her signature gift for me. She would always say she couldn't stay long and had to go home for dinner with Sir Run Run.

When Mona arrived for my 88th birthday party at the InterContinental hotel, I was welcoming guests at the ballroom entrance. Halfway down the stairs to the lobby where she was waiting for me, I hesitated. She looked up at me and said, 'Aren't you coming to escort me?'

'I can't because these many stairs are frightening for this elderly man,' I replied. We smiled and a mutual friend, Benny Wong, accompanied her the rest of the way.



■ Mona Fong at my 88th birthday charity party, InterContinental hotel, 2012.

I was devastated when Mona passed away on 22 November 2017. Mona, you will always have a place in my heart.

As a disc jockey I receive listener requests every day. In all the time we knew each other, Mona only once requested a song on my programme. After our dinner at the Mandarin Oriental in 2004, Mona rang my mobile on her way home and asked me to play the song 'Eternally' by Vic Damone for her.



I'll be loving you eternally  
There'll be no one new, my dear, for me  
Though the sky should fall  
Remember I shall always be  
Forever true and loving you  
Eternally

### **BRONZE BAUHINIA STAR AWARD, 2008**

In 2008, I was awarded the Bronze Bauhinia Star by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China for my 'life-long contribution to the promotion of popular music'. The Order of the Bauhinia Star is an honour system that was created in 1997 after the British handover and is awarded in recognition of notable contributions by individuals for service to the community or their respective fields of business over a long period.



Sir Donald Tsang (former Chief Executive of the HKSAR) and his wife, Selina Tsang, socialise with me in the garden of Government House after the Bronze Bauhinia Star presentation, 2008.



## HONORARY FELLOWSHIP, 2012, AND FOLK ARTIST ALBERT AU



**I** Me, an Honorary Fellow of the Hong Kong APA, 2012.

Most people will have no real understanding of the things you have to give up in war. When the fighting broke out in Hong Kong in 1941 just a few months before my graduation from St. Joseph's College, I was forced to drop out of school. It has always been a major regret that

I couldn't complete my secondary school education and experience the joy of earning my diploma. Sixty-one years later in 2012, I finally did experience that joy, after a fashion, when I was made an Honorary Fellow by the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. The award is given to individuals for outstanding contributions and achievement in the cultural and creative industries in Hong Kong. I was none the wiser as to who had nominated me, as such information is kept confidential, until my godson Albert Au told me months after the presentation ceremony, at my birthday party, that he was the person behind it all.

Albert is named the 'Prince of Folk' in Hong Kong. Every Sunday evening since 1999, Albert has been joined by friends and special guests on *Music Reunion*, a live music folk-centric show on Radio 2 that is heavy on nostalgia. In December each year, he dedicates an episode of his show to celebrate my birthday. And so he should, he is my godson, after all!

We met each other at Tom Lee Music in Tsim Sha Tsui in the seventies. While in the store, I heard someone playing flamenco music on the guitar. It was a real surprise as this Spanish folk music style was uncommon in Hong Kong. I looked around, to find a teenager producing this vibrant gypsy sound. It was Albert.

I subsequently saw Albert perform a live set at the Captain's Table (a lounge located at the junction of Waterloo Road and Prince Edward Road). Norman Cheng and Raymond Ng Shek Fai (the head of the Chinese service of RTHK at the time) were there with me. Albert's talent and enthusiasm didn't go unnoticed and he later signed up with PolyGram as a recording artist and with RTHK as a disc jockey.

Albert began with western folk music before converting to Cantopop in the mid-1970s. *This is Albert Au* was his first English album. As a show of support to a novice singer, I specially narrated the spoken parts of the song 'When A Child Is Born' for him. The theme song to an RTHK radio drama taken from his debut Chinese album (陌上歸人) was selected for a Top Ten Chinese Gold Song Award in 1979, the first of many more to come.

Albert, I'm so very proud of you.



Former Chief Secretary of the HKSAR presents the Honorary Fellowship Certificate to me at the Lyric Theatre, APA, 28 June 2012.

'I believe there are uniquely gifted individuals in this world and one of them is our Uncle Ray. Uncle is a walking dictionary and encyclopaedia of the music scene, able to provide an answer upon enquiry. My most unforgettable experience was when I asked him about some old songs. To my surprise, he answered immediately in detail and took me to the Radio 3 studio, where in no time he picked out the CD I wanted from his enormous music library.

He is the jewel of Radio Hong Kong! Jewel of the local music scene! Uncle Ray, the jewel of Hong Kong!

*Candy Chea Suk Mui*

Media Personality

'I remember when starting out as a band member, I relied on listening to Uncle Ray's radio show, where I learnt so many English songs.'

*Bennett Pang*

Singer

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

# ENRICHING LIFE'S ENJOYMENT

**H**AVING INTERESTS outside of work is important in life. It relieves stress, offers opportunities to make new friends and builds self-esteem.

We are lucky to have so many choices available today to add colour and interest to our lives, which was not the case in my early years. Things were very different then. There was no television or internet and few had money, so people had to be inventive to keep themselves amused after working hours. Transport links were limited beyond the urban areas, and many relied on local street entertainment or the cinema. Itinerant Cantonese opera held in makeshift bamboo theatres was popular, as was visiting a fortune teller, cricket fighting (a traditional hobby and betting activity handed down from China's Song dynasty), playing Chinese chess and of course mah-jong. Children meanwhile could entertain themselves for hours on their own or in groups competitively playing shuttlecock, 'kicking' a homemade or cheaply bought shuttlecock with their legs, feet and elbows to keep it in the air for as long as possible. Children would also roller skate. Playgrounds as we know them now did not exist, but many streets were free of traffic. Later people turned to horse racing and gambling.

I now have three major hobbies: collecting pop memorabilia, horse racing and ball sports.

## POP MEMORABILIA

### My Vinyl Collection

When my brother, Armando, left for Shanghai almost a century ago, he gifted me all his ten-inch 78 rpm records. I treasure every one of them because, in a large part, they're a tether to my youth. From that early time, I fell in love with music and became a collector. I was never interested in financial gain, only in the challenge of collecting. My stash covers vinyl records, compact discs, autographs and interview recordings.

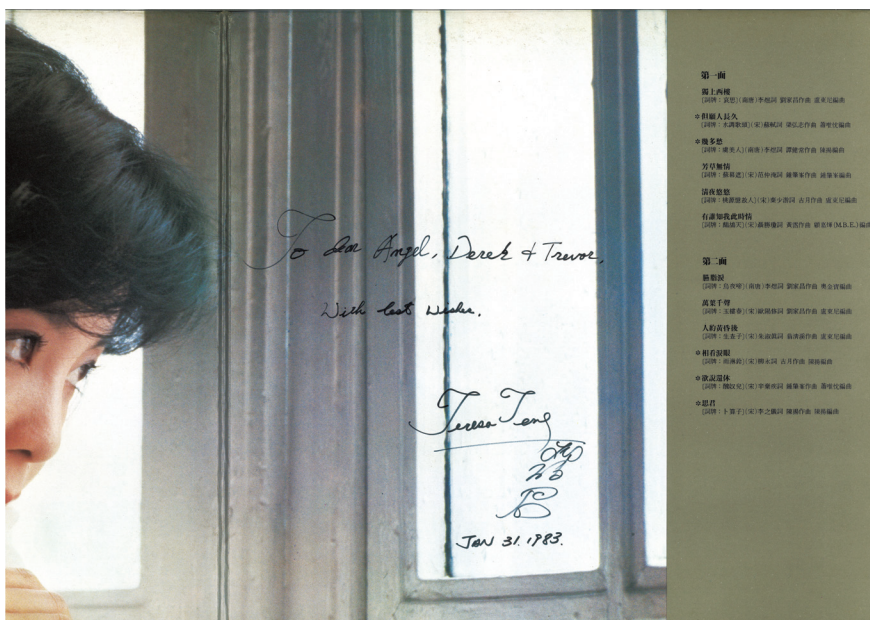
Where does the bulk of my collection come from? Way back when, I received dozens of promotional singles and albums from record companies every week. They quickly became outdated and most disc jockeys threw them away. I did the opposite, adding discs to my library up to the 1990s and supplemented them with purchases from music outlets I used to frequent. Don't ask me how many records I have, though. I never count! Other than occasional limited releases for diehard fans, the days of vinyl and compact discs are long gone, of course. We all now consume digital music content instead.



My vinyl collection corner and my favourites: The Beatles, Cliff Richard and Elvis Presley, 2020.



The late Teresa Teng. Vinyl records have high resale value, up to 50 times their original release price.



With the autograph of the late Teresa Teng, the disc's value jumps to over HK\$10,000. I gifted this record to Derek Cruz's family in 1983. When vinyl records were no longer popular in the 1990s, his father, Johnny Cruz, returned all the vinyl records to me because he knew I was a vinyl collector.





My 1962-autographed album from Frank Sinatra.

### Autographs of Stars



Cilla Black, one of the UK's best-loved entertainers.



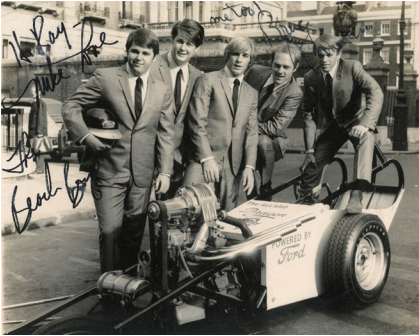
Henry Mancini, winner of four Oscars for his soundtracks.



Jo Stafford.



Tony Bennett, 1980s.



■ The Beach Boys.



■ The Supremes, one of the most successful all-female groups in the mid-1960s.



■ Pop band Manfred Mann, 1964.



■ Herman's Hermits, 1966.



■ The Searchers, 1964.





■ The Kinks, 1964.



■ Freddie and the Dreamers, 1964.

## **Building a Collection**

As I have mentioned, my motive for collecting autographed items is purely for pleasure. But for those of you looking at collecting pop memorabilia from an ‘investment’ standpoint, here are a few pointers.

Vinyl records are a good place to start. If nothing else, they’re something to listen to. Scarcity and recording quality are two major factors that help drive up future resale value, as do records signed by the artists. And as I came to learn, their value can appreciate exponentially when offered up at charitable auctions – bidders at such events are always more generous. For my 60th anniversary in broadcasting, for example, I donated a signed Diana Ross album and was able to raise \$80,000 for the Yan Oi Tong charity group.

You’ll need sufficient storage space for discs; newer releases, in particular, are generally bulkier and heavier than their predecessors. Just as wine is sensitive to the elements, so too are records and improper care will drastically reduce their integrity. They can easily warp when stacked or are not tightly shelved and are affected by dust and humidity. Crackling is the result of dirt accumulated in a record’s grooves. Cleaning should be done using a vinyl record washer and suitable detergent to preserve sound quality. Brushes, even specialised ones, don’t work and will only embed dust particles deeper into the record grooves and cause degradation. However, we do use a stylus brush for a turntable’s moving cartridge, which is also prone to picking up dust. When handling vinyl, touch only the edges and centre label.

An alternative is collecting autographs. It can be as basic as a signed piece of scrap paper. This is very common among fans. Concert tickets, souvenirs, flyers and posters are also ideal for collection. The hope is to identify artists with potential for future financial reward.

Depending on the overall condition of the items, a collection will normally appreciate in value. Some won't be worth much, if anything at all (because of doubtful quality or there being no demand for the title or the artist, for example), so it is important to choose wisely, mainly looking to rarity and aesthetics as determining factors.

### **HORSE RACING, THE SPORT OF KINGS**

My appreciation of horses goes back to playing football at Happy Valley in my teenage years. The recreation ground overlooked the racecourse and I was enthralled by these noble animals – their athleticism and grace, and the way they respond to a jockey's coaxing to be the first to pass the post. I had hoped that one day I could compete as a professional jockey. But life had something else in store, and I ended up a jockey of a different kind!

Amateur horse racing was introduced to Hong Kong by the British, and the Royal Hong Kong Jockey Club, a nonprofit organisation that donates its proceeds to charity and funds community projects, was founded in 1884. A year later, the territory's first racecourse opened in Happy Valley. Enthusiasm for horse racing soared when the Jockey Club opened membership to the Chinese in 1926. There was no racing during the Japanese occupation in the Second World War, but it resumed shortly after in 1947. Racing turned professional in 1971 following the discovery of widespread doping and race fixing. The former Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping reassured Hong Kong people that horse racing would continue when the city's sovereignty returned to China in 1997: 'Horses will still run, stocks will still sizzle, dancers will still dance,' he declared. After that happened, the club dropped the 'royal' title and continued operating as the Hong Kong Jockey Club.



I think horse racing is the best spectator sport in the world. Much of its appeal admittedly lies in betting on the outcome of races, but who doesn't relish the prospect of picking a winner? Having the inside track heightens the thrill, owning a racehorse the cherry on top. In such circumstances, trainers and jockeys will privately share their tips with you, though in my experience they pan out far less successfully than people imagine; like just about everyone else, I ultimately lost more money than I made. That didn't really matter to me. I rationalised I would be contributing indirectly to those in need via the Jockey Club's benevolent initiatives. Another reason I adored racing was because I considered it a social event with friends. Unfortunately, I stopped attending the racecourse about 15 years ago because I was unable to walk from the carpark to the VIP boxes, let alone stand and shout for the horses I'd bet on all day long. Nowadays, I gamble from the comfort of home.



■ At the racecourse with Norman Cheng, Danny Diaz and Teddy Robin, 1997.

Local Portuguese have a strong representation in the horse racing community. The Cruz family are considered racing royalty in Hong Kong. Johnny Cruz, a popular jockey in the amateur era, was a pal. Riding Lakh Mark to victory in the 1965 Hong Kong Derby under esteemed trainer Nick Metrevelli wasn't just his



■ Johnny Cruz's Derby trophy, 1965.

greatest triumph but a triumph for the Portuguese community. Johnny never held back or cheated. He taught me it is always an advantage to position your horse at the front because you can control the pace of the race. His son Tony Cruz is a former multiple champion jockey who transitioned into an equally successful trainer.

Additionally, I had the good fortune of being a horse owner from 1995 to 2002. My buddy Norman Cheng helped me pick We Know When in the United States and brought the griffin (an unraced horse imported to Hong Kong) over on my behalf. The horse was named in honour of my old Portuguese friend David Silva, the owner of Yuno When, Derby winner and Horse of the Year in 1986.

With Tony Cruz in the saddle on New Year's Day 1996, the last day of his riding career, We Know When placed second. After the race, Tony confidently predicted I would have many winners to come. He was right. The horse was victorious on five occasions and a participant in the 1997 Royal Hong Kong Derby, the pinnacle for all local horse owners. Though he didn't win then, I'm proud of his achievements.



Winner's paddock with We Know When, 21 February 1999.



Enjoying leisure time at Shatin Racecourse, 1997.

Another horse I need to mention is Primo. The colt belonged to the Portuguese Club Lusitano Syndicate and was managed by Tony Cruz. I am confident I was a syndicate member; if not, I was always out there shouting for Primo. He won four of his first eleven races in the two seasons 1997 and 1998. On his twelfth run he unfortunately slipped, broke his leg and had to be put down. According to Tony, the grass on the track had grown too long, which made the surface extremely slippery. We were all saddened, but accidents are inevitable in racing. The syndicate disbanded soon thereafter.

Silent Witness was another pride of the Portuguese racing fraternity. The horse was officially recognised as the world's top sprinter for three seasons. He belonged to Archie da Silva, a fellow Portuguese horse owner. Trained by Tony Cruz, the thoroughbred racehorse was unbeaten in his first 17 starts in Hong Kong in the early 2000s – a record in local racing history.



Tony Cruz, far right; Johnny Cruz, fourth from right; Archie da Silva next to me in dark suit and tie; and Primo behind us, 1998.



Although I am no longer a horse owner, my enthusiasm for horse racing hasn't waned. I still tune in twice a week for the local race broadcast, and not before studying the form guide!

Also, on a personal level, while my nephew Anthony Souza is a Jockey Club voting member and serves as an honorary judge on race days, racing remains firmly in the family! Those in the judges' box decide a horse's placing in every race in accordance with the racing rules and regulations. Together with the stewards, they also handle enquiries and objections from jockeys and trainers to ensure racing integrity.

As close calls always cause consternation among punters, the judges' decisions are critical. Fortunately, the judges at the Hong Kong Jockey Club are very experienced and accomplished, and can rely on sophisticated monitoring equipment.



With my nephew Anthony Souza, a race day honorary judge.

## ENJOYING BALL SPORTS

When I was younger I kept very active. I was particularly fond of playing football with friends and colleagues, and post-match

socialising was the perfect way to wind down. Lee Wai Tong, known as the 'King of Football in China', was my colleague at Rediffusion, having joined as a football commentator in the 1950s. With a champion in the ranks, the station knew they had an ace up their sleeve and fully capitalised on that to appeal to sponsors and advertisers. A Rediffusion Minifootball team that would play friendly matches against sponsors and advertisers on a regular basis was also formed to further the charm offensive. Wai Tong led the line for us in his customary striker's role and with my height advantage I was the goalkeeper. Chung Wai Ming, another veteran Chinese broadcaster, and other Chinese colleagues made up the remaining team members.

During the sixties, I would join Norman Cheng, Teddy Robin, Frederick Chan and other pop artists for football matches. Music aside, they were all football mad. If they weren't onstage, you would most likely find them on the football pitch.



Members of the Rediffusion football team. Lee Wai Tong (front row, second left), me (front row, third left), Chung Wai Ming (back row, centre) and others, 1957.



I also enjoyed softball and was the manager and occasional player of the Giants team from the late 1960s to the 1970s. Our best record was ten consecutive victories. We also represented Hong Kong at the Third World Men's Softball Championship in the Philippines in 1972.



Me and my softball team, the Giants, late 1960s.



Me, as road manager of the Giants, my softball team, with other participants at the Third World Men's Softball Championship in the Philippines, 1972.

Tenpin bowling was another commonly played sport in Hong Kong in the early years of my career. I hope you all remember Catherine Che Kuk Hung, the athlete who won Hong Kong's first-ever gold medal at the 1986 Asian Games in Seoul, South Korea. She finished with a combined score of 1,165 in the women's singles bowling event. What glory for Hong Kong! Although nowhere near as accomplished as Catherine, my bowling skills were pretty decent. I was a frequent player at Star Bowling and Brunswick Bowling in the seventies and was once part of a team that won a local amateur bowling championships competition.

I'm far too old now to play any ball games, but I do get my sports fix as an armchair fan. Whether it's watching football, tennis, basketball or

snooker on the television, they help me relax and deliver a vicarious thrill.

Without hobbies, life would be rather dull and boring.

After all, it was my drumming hobby all those years ago in Macau as a teenager, improvising with the kitchen pots and pans and a pair of chopsticks, that ultimately led to my making a life for myself as a disc jockey.



■ Aiming to bowl a strike, 1970s.

‘Uncle Ray is my real godfather, chosen as my sponsor at my baptism as an infant. My earliest memory of him was his opening up the world of horse racing to my father. To this day, my dad still enjoys horse racing very much.

Uncle was the most popular DJ playing western pop in the 1970s. He was also the only DJ focusing on interviewing foreign artists. His achievements were well recognised and, ultimately, he was awarded the MBE, presented at Buckingham Palace by the Queen.

I don’t get the chance to listen to his late-night show as often as I’d like, but I was told he would at times play “Stairway to Heaven”, an eight-minute-long track. One time, I asked him about it, thinking he would say he liked the song. Instead, he told me it was because he needed time to visit the washroom! His good humour is perhaps something we should all learn from.

Apart from inspiring me to listen to western pop, his enthusiasm also encouraged and motivated many key figures in the music scene. I hope that his spirit will continue to influence players in Hong Kong’s music industry today and tomorrow.’

*Ronald Cheng*  
Singer and Actor

## CHAPTER TWELVE

# ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

**A**S PEOPLE AGE, they become more susceptible to chronic conditions such as arthritis, diabetes, heart disease and bronchitis, among others. I am not an exception.

In early 2010, I began to experience dizzy spells and was easily tired. After an extended series of medical tests, my doctor – and saviour – Dr. Charles Ho, informed me that I had aortic stenosis and would need surgery. The disease causes a narrowing of the aortic valve opening, limiting blood flow from the left ventricle to the brain and the rest of the body. It is a life-threatening condition.

Aortic valve replacement constitutes a high-risk procedure in a person the age I was then, 85 years. In consideration of my age, Dr. Ho requested Professor Cheng Lik Cheung from the Li Ka Shing Faculty of Medicine of the University of Hong Kong to perform the operation.

Of course there was a wait, during which time I tried to take things more easily, but finally in June 2010, two weeks prior to my scheduled operation, Dr. Ho, my godson Andy and I went to see Professor Cheng at Queen Mary Hospital on Hong Kong Island for a preoperative evaluation. Afterwards, Dr. Ho stated he was confident about the surgery as I would be in Professor Cheng's capable hands and told me not to worry.

I was admitted to QMH the night before the operation, which was arranged for 10 a.m. the next morning. I was very restless, worrying

over the procedure and resorting to reminiscing about old times to distract myself. Andy arrived at dawn and calmed my nerves by telling me: ‘This will be a successful operation. You will go home in two weeks. Don’t worry.’ In our naivety we didn’t then fully comprehend the difficulties that came with open-heart surgery.

I was transported to the anaesthetic bay at 9 a.m. Andy remained in the waiting area. A nurse told him that the procedure would take some time and suggested that he return after getting something to eat.

Six hours later, at 3 p.m., Professor Cheng walked out from the operating suite.

‘How was the procedure?’ Andy asked, seeing signs of fatigue on the professor’s face.

‘The surgery was satisfactory, but Uncle’s heart and lungs are not functioning yet. He is relying on equipment to breathe for him and make his heart beat. Let’s wait for him to wake up,’ he replied.

Andy would eventually confess that he was left dazed and frightened. What did this mean?

I was taken to the intensive care unit on the fifth floor and for the first evening was placed on life support, my condition classified as ‘Serious but stable’. I subsequently learnt that in my frail state I did briefly wake up but without any cognitive function. It seemed I had temporarily lost my faculties. Dr. Ho came to see me after his shift ended at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Kowloon. He explained to Andy that my current state was a side effect of anaesthesia and wasn’t unusual. I would recover properly in due course.

The first days after surgery were traumatic. I was alert and not in much pain, but utterly exhausted and unable to move or speak. The most frightening thing in the ICU was being among patients who were in a critical condition. I thought I was at death’s door. On the one

hand, I believed I would be joining my family in heaven soon, but on the other I was unwilling to let go of my show, listeners and friends. In reality, I was progressing well and soon enough I realised I would survive. After two weeks, I was out of the ICU and could sit in a chair and eat. Another two weeks after that, I could walk.

I was a patient at QMH for more than a month. I realised how lucky I was to have been looked after by such an outstanding group of medical professionals. The debt I owe them for saving my life can never be repaid, but I can express my profound gratitude: to Dr. Charles Ho for arranging everything and for his diligence and unfailing support; to Professor Cheng for performing my surgery to the highest standards; to Dr. Kathy Lee Lai Fun at Queen Elizabeth Hospital for installing my pacemaker and Dr. Fu Chiu Lai for replacing it in 2019, giving me another decade; and last, but certainly not least, to all the nurses for their meticulous and thoughtful care. Every one of them is my hero.

I followed Dr. Ho's advice and shortened my show from four to three hours after the procedure. You only live once, and my time is limited.

Onwards and upwards, as they say.



Dr. Charles Ho at my 94th birthday party, Yau Yat Chuen Garden City Club, 2018.



I also need to acknowledge my private family doctor and good friend Aron Young, a well-respected obstetrician and gynaecologist. He readily provides treatment whenever I feel unwell. Aron is also a huge fan of Elvis Presley and is the vice president of the local Elvis Presley fan club. He loves singing at clubs and bars and is quite the showman. Thank you, Aron. And to Dr. Peric Lee, Dr. Daniel Yung and Dr. C.H. Leong, I'm relying on you guys to help me become a centenarian!

Let's make it happen!



My doctor friends. From left: Peric Lee, Aron Young, Edward Leong, Charles Ho and Daniel Yung, 2019.

## TIME TO REFLECT

Lately, I have got into the habit of relaxing after returning home from my late-night show with a favourite drink and snack in hand, letting my thoughts drift to times gone by, ever grateful for the new lease on life my surgery gave me.

The halcyon years of radio and the people, or rather should I say friends, who contributed so passionately to music locally made for such happy times – perhaps the happiest – of my life, and I am very proud to have been a part of them.

Re-reading the feature story in *The Sun* newspaper from 40 years ago, I knew I had done something for the music scene, but was it that much? It was really a joint effort by everyone concerned. Increasingly today, the industry seems governed by self-interest. Back then this happened rarely; we were more like one big family. On live pop shows, nobody cared about top billing; singers and groups were just delighted to perform. The money was peanuts, but the shows were fun. The audiences felt this unity, too, their enthusiasm and encouragement in turn fuelling the performers to give nothing less than their absolute best.

To all these people, these music aficionados, I give my sincerest thanks. You helped make this possible.



Sam Hui is another stalwart of the Hong Kong music scene. Known locally as the King of Cantopop, 50 years ago he gave a solo performance in my studio at RHK, 1970.



Hong Kong-born Teresa Carpio wows audiences all over the world with her powerful voice and thrilling stage performances. She divides her time between Hong Kong and Canada but always makes time to visit me in my studio or attend charity shows when she is here. Hong Kong, 2004.

## MY LIFE'S WORK RECORDED

‘When will you retire?’ I am asked.

‘As long as my health is fine, I have no plan to retire.’

‘At your age, what drives you to work five days a week?’

Many fans have listened to me since my early days. We share a promise that I will always be there on Radio 3 every weeknight, welcoming them next to their radio. The show must go on. It is my pleasure to say, ‘Hi there, this is Ray Cordeiro,’ to my listeners. No matter how bad I feel, once I walk into the studio, I’m full of energy – and ready to go.

I wish my show could go on forever.

It is 92 years since broadcasting was introduced in Hong Kong, and for more than 71 of those years I have witnessed the ups and downs of the industry and of the music scene. These aren’t only my stories, but Hong Kong’s too. I committed to preserving all these precious memories and started writing my autobiography almost 20 years ago, the first draft

of which I completed in September 2002. I didn't set a time frame for seeing my book published, I only cared about doing it well. Sadly, the manuscript was left untouched until 2019. I kept putting things off. There was far too much to do to get the manuscript and photographs to print, and I was unsure who could help.



Officiating the historic Run Santa Run for Hope Worldwide. The Peak, 2014. From left: Me, Candy Chea and Cheung Man Sun.

Chip Chao, a local journalist, approached me in 2016 about producing a documentary film of my long career. After careful consideration, I turned him down believing instead that the right party for the task was RTHK, the broadcasting service that I was a part of for most of all that time.

Despite being a veteran of the radio station, I wasn't well acquainted with the new management. Consequently, I contacted Cheung Man Sun (former Assistant Director of Broadcasting and the founder of the annual Top Ten Chinese Gold Songs Awards) who had just retired. He said he would do his best to help.

It was a pleasant surprise when Lo Chi Wah, the producer of the television department, got in touch with me later that year. He introduced me to Janus Ngai, the director responsible for my documentary film. I coordinated with the parties involved and offered whatever assistance



I could provide. I was looking forward at last to having my life's work recorded for posterity.

Janus informed Andy twelve months on that the top management of RTHK had decided to include my film in a special television series for the station's 90th anniversary celebration. He added that he had to modify the first cut (which I never saw) based on the revised guidelines set by his producer. Though I was eager to have my documentary released as soon as possible, I had no influence on the decision. My hands were tied. The content was chosen by others.

On the afternoon of 15 May 2018, three days before the anniversary press conference, Janus finally showed me *Uncle Ray's Time Machine*. To my bewilderment, it was a sixties retrospective of Hong Kong with unimportant talking heads and people spouting boring platitudes. It certainly wasn't my documentary. Worst of all, the finale showed me walking slowly into RTHK with the aid of a walking stick, a pathetic note on which to end my career. That's what it signified to me, anyway, and it was awful. After all, I'm proud of always being the oldest teenager in town. To this day, I fail to understand why Janus set initial false expectations and then kept me in the dark when the focus of the documentary had shifted. It demonstrated a fundamental lack of respect and honesty.

My real life story was still pending. The anguish finally dissipated on 17 April 2019 when Andy said: 'Just tell me "yes" if you want to proceed with your autobiography. You don't have to explain. I'll manage everything for you.' I handed him the draft prepared in 2002 and we got the ball rolling.

## **HONG KONG MUSEUM OF HISTORY 2022**

In early 2017, the curator of the Hong Kong Museum of History, Osman Chan, invited me to participate in a planned 2022 exhibition

featuring the life of the local Portuguese community, when renovation of the museum is due to be completed. It is part of a rotating thematic series documenting the ethnic minorities who have helped to build Hong Kong's diverse culture and heritage. I agreed to loan to the exhibition personal items that chronicle my career and represent snapshots of my music life in Hong Kong. The items include, but are not limited to:

- A copy of *Fabulous* magazine autographed by The Beatles in their historic visit to the colony in 1964
- The first-ever English-speaking Disc Jockey Award
- A vinyl record signed by Quincy Jones
- The portrait of me drawn by Teddy Robin
- A poster autographed by Tony Bennett
- My Guinness Certificate as the 'World's Most Durable Radio DJ', and
- My beloved old friend, my Butterfly harmonica

Come and share in our Portuguese story in 2022 if you are in the neighbourhood.

## **MY 100<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY IN 2024**

Looking back, it all seems like a dream. Imperceptibly, this is my 71st year in broadcasting. I will be into my 97th year by the time this book is released. How time flies.

The documentary debacle of 2018 does little to sour my 61-year-long relationship with RTHK. I have always believed life is too precious to hold grudges. I don't fixate on the past. I look forward to a brighter future. I encourage everyone to enjoy their lives to the fullest.



I treasure every celebration with family members, friends and colleagues. There were so many wonderful parties in my career, and each marked an important milestone in my lifetime. I am grateful to RTHK for their hand in the many functions that were so meaningful to me:

- The sixties-themed concert for my retirement from the government at Baptist University's Academic Community Hall in 1980
- MBE celebrations at the Shangri-La Hotel in 1987
- Golden 70th birthday party at the Regal Riverside Ballroom in 1994
- 80th charity birthday party with Po Leung Kuk at the HKCEC in 2004
- 60th anniversary in broadcasting charity party with Yan Oi Tong Cancer Fund at the HKCEC in 2010
- 88th charity birthday party with Lok Sin Tong Benevolent Society at the InterContinental hotel in 2012, and
- My 90th charity birthday party with Lok Sin Tong at the HKCEC in 2014

Since joining RHK in 1960 I have served under ten directors of broadcasting, from Donald Brooks (my first director) to Leung Ka Wing in 2021. I've also had the good fortune to work with many talented individuals over the years.

I am the world's longest-standing disc jockey and, God willing, I still have a way to go. The ultimate landmark of my life, 12 December 2024, will be the day I become a centenarian. I wish to be the first person in Hong Kong, if not the world, to celebrate my 100th birthday in a concert format.

Four years is a relatively long time. For me, it's an interminable wait. But I will soldier on, continuing my journey in the only way I know how: with Joy, Music and Dedication.

One beat at a time.

## Celebrating an Earlier Milestone



Teddy Robin, Albert Au, Jacky Cheung and other officiating guests sing 'Happy Birthday' to me onstage at the HKCEC, 2014.



Pupils of Lok Sin Tong Primary School, a beneficiary of the HKCEC concert, kindly created and gave me this record-shaped birthday card, 2014.

‘When my two daughters were very young, around four and six years old, they used to listen to the radio at night while they were in bed in our Happy Valley apartment. I didn’t know at the time, but they were listening to *All The Way With Ray*. One night they tuned in but Uncle Ray wasn’t there and they came rushing into our room, worried that something had happened to him! I had to call the station to reassure them that, in fact, he was just fine and just happened to be off that night. What a musical education they got from him! Such is the impact he has had on so many, many music fans over the years.

Thank you, Uncle Ray, for your love of music and support of local artists, and long may you continue!’

*Teresa Carpio*  
Singer and Voice Coach  
*and Family*

## EPILOGUE

When I began to write my autobiography almost 20 years ago, little did I think that it would take me until now to see it in print.

Since finally completing the manuscript at the beginning of this year, with the key help of Andy Chow my godson, I have had ample time to reflect on how lucky I've been to have had a career that has brought me so much joy: a career which I have mostly spent playing music and mixing with renowned local and international artists.

Seeing my life set out in this book: the decades of history, the anecdotes and the pictures of days long gone, has brought me a sense of fulfilment. As a disc jockey, I have a very strong bond with my listeners and have long been unwilling to say goodbye to them. But the reality is that I am now 96 and am not getting any younger as the days and the weeks pass. Like countless others around the globe, I have found working these past many months in the presence of Covid-19 difficult, especially knowing that I am in the high-risk demographic, both for the virus and the vaccination. As much as I want to go on spinning my discs forever, I know I cannot.

Everything in life has a beginning and an end. My career began on a requisitioned river steamer in Macau that served as a refugee camp, where in a moment of insight I knew when the war was over, I would learn to play the drums and become a musician. Bringing my career to an end, however, isn't quite so easy. It is an excruciating decision to have to make for someone who has fully devoted himself to his job for more than 70 years. But stop I must, and I can take comfort in the fact that it will be on my own terms. As it should be.

I have decided to hang up my headphones and retire with the release of this book. Making this choice will leave a great void in my life. But the memories will never fade, and the dreams will never end.

The ultimate landmark of my life, 12 December 2024, when I become a centenarian, is one I dearly wish to celebrate. And I have every intention of doing it in style among my fans and my friends.

I look forward to seeing you then!

In the meantime, I thank you all for your enduring support of me and of my show. Some of you I have known for well over 50 years and I value our friendships profoundly.

And so, for one last time...

*From me, Ray Cordeiro, good night!*



**'As Time Goes By'**





# The World's Most Durable Radio DJ

Heard on AM567

'Music is meant for us to share.  
Ray works his magic by playing pop and oldies on air.  
Music is meant to be enjoyed.  
Ray's nightly show ensures our hearts are buoyed.'

*Paul Chan*  
Financial Secretary HKSAR

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'Uncle Ray was the first radio DJ I ever knew. We had been listening to him way back in the Losers era, before we changed our band name to The Wynners. Uncle Ray was the first DJ in Hong Kong to introduce the latest western hits to the music scene. Thanks to his radio show, we learnt so many new foreign songs to perform on TV shows and in nightclubs. Uncle is an exceptional senior figure in the music scene.'

*Alan Tam*  
Singer and Actor

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'Thank you, Uncle Ray, for your love of music and support of local artists, and long may you continue!'

*Teresa Carpio*  
Singer and Voice Coach

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'Not only is Uncle Ray a legendary DJ in Hong Kong, he is also a fount of knowledge, witnessing the past century's history, developments, and the ups and downs of Hong Kong. I'm definitely looking forward to reading his autobiography, which may give me a better understanding of what is happening here and where to go in the future! Way to go, Uncle Ray!'

*Jacky Cheung Hok-yau*  
Singer and Actor