

Li Wei Song & Li Si Song: Singapore's musical twins

Written by Jaime Koh on 10 February 2014

Twin brothers Paul Li Wei Song (李伟菘) and Peter Li Si Song (李偲菘) are two of Singapore's most prolific songwriters and producers. The pair first made their names in penning memorable tunes for local Singapore Broadcasting Corporation Chinese drama serials. After a short stint as singer-songwriters, both retreated behind the scenes to focus on songwriting and production. They have written songs and produced albums for stars such as Jacky Cheung, Sandy Lam, Stefanie Sun and Gigi Leung.

Twins Paul Li Wei Song and Peter Li Si Song were born on 24 July 1967. Paul is the older twin, by five minutes.¹ The boys grew up in a music-loving family. Their grandfather was a music teacher, their father played the organ and their mother loved Zhou Xuan's songs.²

The boys started learning to play the piano in primary school.³ In secondary school, Peter became interested in the organ, which he felt was more exciting than the piano.⁴ He found classical music boring and preferred the more contemporary rock and pop tunes.⁵

In their younger days, the twins would have music jamming sessions with their friends and sister at their home. Peter said: "Every weekend was our musical stage. My sister would play the piano, me, the organ and Wei Song the drums. Those times were wonderful memories."⁶

The brothers credited their father for inculcating in them a love of music and financially supporting their talent. Li Senior bought the brothers instruments and musical equipment such as pianos, guitars, synthesizers and sound-mixers which they needed.⁷ He said: "I had not been given the chance to learn the things they did because my parents were poor. Since I could afford it, I had to help them in whatever way I could to fulfill their dreams."⁸

¹ 1967 (2006, October 11). *Today*.

² 李伟菘, 李偲菘. (2011). *我们的乐园: 李伟菘. 李偲菘流行音乐创作精选*, p. 73. 高雄: 卓著文化事业有限公司.

³ 李伟菘, 李偲菘. (2011). *我们的乐园: 李伟菘. 李偲菘流行音乐创作精选*, p. 73. 高雄: 卓著文化事业有限公司.

⁴ 李伟菘, 李偲菘. (2011). *我们的乐园: 李伟菘. 李偲菘流行音乐创作精选*, p. 73. 高雄: 卓著文化事业有限公司.

⁵ 李伟菘, 李偲菘. (2011). *我们的乐园: 李伟菘. 李偲菘流行音乐创作精选*, p. 78. 高雄: 卓著文化事业有限公司.

⁶ 李伟菘, 李偲菘. (2011). *我们的乐园: 李伟菘. 李偲菘流行音乐创作精选*, p. 73. 高雄: 卓著文化事业有限公司.

⁷ Lee, S. Y. (2006, February 6). Forever young. *Straits Times*.

⁸ Lee, S. Y. (2006, February 6). Forever young. *Straits Times*.

Starting out

The brothers' first break came around 1983. While still in secondary school, the pair took part in a songwriting competition organised by the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) for its drama serial, *The Awakening* (雾锁南洋). The brothers submitted a song each and both entries made it to the top 10. Even though the twins did not win the competition, they attracted the attention of the media because of their youth and the fact that they were twins.⁹

After their "O" Levels, the brothers decided to make music their profession. Paul said: "I asked my brother if he loved music enough to quit school and pursue a full-time career in music. He said yes. Just like that, we became what we are today."¹⁰

The brothers soon made their name composing theme songs for SBC drama serials. Their credits include theme songs for *Samsui Women* (红头巾) and *Good Morning Teacher* (早安老师).¹¹ The brothers penned more than a hundred songs for drama serials between them.¹² Every theme song they wrote was tailor-made for the intended serial. The brothers did a lot of research before composing these songs. Paul said: "You have to find out the background of the story, the time period it was set in, listen to songs of that era as well as a lot of different music. You also have to compose for the singer's voice in mind."¹³

From singing to songwriting

In 1985, Paul won SBC's Chinese Talentime.¹⁴ His mother had signed him up for the competition.¹⁵ Even then, Paul had already displayed an interest in songwriting. "I think composing is more suitable for me, I hope I can sing my own songs," he said.¹⁶ That was the first major competition Paul ever participated in.¹⁷

After winning Talentime, a recording company approached Paul to form a singing duo with his brother, Peter.¹⁸ Peter recalled he was roped in because the company had

⁹ 庆媛 (1997). 5个专访李偲菘的理由. 犵于, no. 4, p. 7. Singapore: Intersection Publishing House.

¹⁰ Lee, S. Y. (2006, February 6). Forever young. *Straits Times*.

¹¹ 李伟菘, 李偲菘. (2011). *我们的乐园: 李伟菘. 李偲菘流行音乐创作精选*, p. 104. 高雄: 卓著文化事业有限公司.

¹² 李伟菘, 李偲菘. (2011). *我们的乐园: 李伟菘. 李偲菘流行音乐创作精选*, p. 104. 高雄: 卓著文化事业有限公司.

¹³ Boon, R. (2012, July 11). Sing a song of nostalgia. *Straits Times*.

¹⁴ 李伟菘, 李偲菘. (2011). *我们的乐园: 李伟菘. 李偲菘流行音乐创作精选*, p. 78. 高雄: 卓著文化事业有限公司.

¹⁵ 李伟菘, 李偲菘. (2011). *我们的乐园: 李伟菘. 李偲菘流行音乐创作精选*, p. 78. 高雄: 卓著文化事业有限公司.

¹⁶ 听听准歌王歌后怎么说? (1986, January 6). *联合早报*.

¹⁷ 李伟菘, 李偲菘. (2011). *我们的乐园: 李伟菘. 李偲菘流行音乐创作精选*, p. 78. 高雄: 卓著文化事业有限公司.

¹⁸ 李伟菘, 李偲菘. (2011). *我们的乐园: 李伟菘. 李偲菘流行音乐创作精选*, p. 79. 高雄: 卓著

hesitations about signing Paul as an individual singer. They felt that there was more market potential if the brothers released albums as twins.¹⁹ The brothers released six albums and an EP: five in Singapore, one in Taiwan and the EP was released in Hong Kong.²⁰

In the 1990s the twins relocated to Taiwan to develop their singing careers. The experience brought them to the realisation that although both loved singing, they loved the creative aspects of songwriting even more. Paul said of the experience in Taiwan: “We couldn’t adjust. We were at a point where we no longer craved audience applause. Our satisfaction now came from creating music for someone else to sing.”²¹

The brothers decided to redirect their career away from performing and focus on songwriting and producing. Paul recalled that this was an arduous process but one that he embraced wholeheartedly. He threw himself into songwriting then bought a plane ticket to Hong Kong where he personally visited every record company to promote his songs.²²

Fortunately, one of Paul’s song, *I waited till the flowers wilt* (我等到花儿也谢了) was chosen for Hong Kong’s God of Songs, Jacky Cheung. This song would later become one of Cheung’s signature tunes.²³ Peter’s big break came with the song, *I heard love came back* (听说爱情回来过) which Sandy Lam sang. Peter composed the tune and co-wrote the lyrics with his wife.²⁴ These two songs took the music world by storm and launched the twins’ careers as songwriters and producers. “More and more people looked for us to write songs and produce albums,” said Paul.²⁵

Since then, the brothers have written and produced albums for Jacky Cheung, Gigi Leung, Stefanie Sun, and Sandy Lam among others.²⁶ Ng King Kang, a journalist and songwriter said: “They were a great team, helping each other as they juggled between

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¹⁹ 李伟菘, 李偲菘. (2011). *我们的乐园: 李伟菘. 李偲菘流行音乐创作精选*, p. 79. 高雄: 卓著文化事业有限公司.

²⁰ 李伟菘, 李偲菘. (2011). *我们的乐园: 李伟菘. 李偲菘流行音乐创作精选*, p. 80. 高雄: 卓著文化事业有限公司.

²¹ Songs of success (2006, October 11). *TODAY*.

²² 李伟菘, 李偲菘. (2011). *我们的乐园: 李伟菘. 李偲菘流行音乐创作精选*, p. 14. 高雄: 卓著文化事业有限公司.

²³ 李伟菘, 李偲菘. (2011). *我们的乐园: 李伟菘. 李偲菘流行音乐创作精选*, p. 15. 高雄: 卓著文化事业有限公司.

²⁴ 李伟菘, 李偲菘. (2011). *我们的乐园: 李伟菘. 李偲菘流行音乐创作精选*, p. 18. 高雄: 卓著文化事业有限公司.

²⁵ 李伟菘, 李偲菘. (2011). *我们的乐园: 李伟菘. 李偲菘流行音乐创作精选*, p. 14. 高雄: 卓著文化事业有限公司.

²⁶ 李伟菘, 李偲菘. (2011). *我们的乐园: 李伟菘. 李偲菘流行音乐创作精选*, pp. 90-104. 高雄: 卓著文化事业有限公司.

their singing and their songwriting careers. You could never see such camaraderie in other groups.”²⁷

Professional development

In 1994, the brothers went their separate ways professionally due to a clash of musical styles.²⁸ Paul preferred oriental-style classical music while Peter preferred more western contemporary tunes. “We were too naive then, believing that being twins, we would have the same thinking and share the same opinions about the tunes we produced. Obviously, we were wrong,” Peter said.²⁹ Paul agreed. “It was a tough decision, but we knew it would be better if we struck out on our own.”³⁰

In 1995, Paul opened the Lee Wei Song School of Music (LWSSoM) to train the next generation of Singapore singers³¹ while Peter set up a music production company, Tofu Street.³² Both the LWSSoM and Tofu Street come under a parent company, EasternWorld, which the brothers co-owned.³³ Peter is also the music producer at LWSSoM.³⁴

After many years of working behind the scenes, the Li brothers, especially Paul returned to the media limelight as musical mentors to pop sensation Stefanie Sun (孙燕姿) in 2000. Sun was a student at the LWSSoM. The brothers trained Sun, composed award-winning songs for her and produced her earliest albums.

Today, the LWSSoM has branches in Malaysia, Taiwan and China.³⁵ In 2007, the brothers formed Wise Entertainment to handle their various interests including musical training, publishing, production and artiste management.^{36 37}

Quote

“Being young at heart helps me stay creative. I am curious about all things and the people around me, which gives me the drive to go on.” – Paul Li Wei Song³⁸

“Music is a natural thing, we should not go against our character. The most important thing is to do what you want to do, to look for your own direction.”- Peter Li Si Song³⁹

Albums

²⁷ Lee, S. Y. (2006, February 6). Forever young. *Straits Times*.

²⁸ Lee, S. Y. (2006, February 6). Forever young. *Straits Times*.

²⁹ Lee, S. Y. (2006, February 6). Forever young. *Straits Times*

³⁰ Lee, S. Y. (2006, February 6). Forever young. *Straits Times*

³¹ Music coach’s day in the Sun. (2000, September 10). *Straits Times*.

³² Lee, S. Y. (2006, February 6). Forever young. *Straits Times*.

³³ Lee, S. Y. (2006, February 6). Forever young. *Straits Times*.

³⁴ Ong, Y. (2012, March 21). Enrol as a student, leave a star. *Straits Times*.

³⁵ Yap, R. (2001, June 3). Are you... a singer of substance? *Sunday Mail*. (Malaysia)

³⁶ Ong, Y. (2012, March 21). Enrol as a student, leave a star. *Straits Times*.

³⁷ Lee Wei Song School of Music. Retrieved from <http://leeweisong.wordpress.com/about/>.

³⁸ Lee, S. Y. (2006, February 6). Forever young. *Straits Times*.

³⁹ 庆媛 (1997). 5个专访李偲菘的理由. 犴テ, no. 4, p. 8. Singapore: Intersection Publishing.

- 1986 我的摇篮
明天需要我和你
- 1989 兄弟情
- 1990 回到原来的我
- 1991 牡丹绿叶
- 1996 伤心 (EP)

Concert

- 2006 Music of the Li Brothers (Part of Huayi Festival)

Awards (Selected)

- 1994 Best Composer for *I've waited till the flowers wilt* (我等到花儿也谢了)
Singapore Hit Awards (Paul)
- 1996 Best Composer (Hong Kong) (Paul & Peter)
- 1997 Best Chinese Music Producer, Compass Awards (Singapore) (Peter)
Best Local Music Composer, Compass Awards (Singapore) (Peter)
- 1998 Best Chinese Music Producer, Compass Awards (Singapore) (Peter)
- 1999 Best Chinese Music Composer, Compass Awards (Singapore) (Paul)
- 2000 Best Composer, Golden Melody Awards (Peter)
- 2001 Best Song (My desired happiness 我要的幸福) , MediaCorp Music Awards (Paul)
Best Producer, (My desired happiness 我要的幸福) , MediaCorp Music Awards (Paul and Peter)
Achievement Award, Star Awards (Singapore) (Paul and Peter)
Meritorious Award, Compass Awards (Singapore) (Paul)
Overseas Achievement Award, Compass Award (Singapore) (Peter)
Best Composition for A Cloudy Day (天黑黑), Golden Melody Awards (Taiwan) (Peter)
- 2004 Singapore Television Best Music Award, Compass Awards
- 2011 Best Producer for *It's Time* (是时候) , Singapore Hit Awards

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