

Eric Moo (巫启贤): From Peak to Peak

by Kong, Kam Yoke, written on 20th August 2010

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Eric Moo, well-known for his numerous hits like Chance Meeting, You Are My Only One, and Too Silly, has suffered numerous career setbacks and bad press to emerge as a controversial yet respected judge in singing talent contests in China.

In an industry where scandal or controversy can make or break an artiste, Eric Moo is the epitome of survival. He is certainly no stranger to bad press. Even his nationality had once upon a time been a point of contention. Things came to a head in 1994 when he received local music awards from both Singapore and Malaysia. Moo pulled out of the local categories of the Singapore Hit Awards.

“I’m a Malaysian, but I’m also a very important singer in the Singapore music scene and it could not afford to do without me at that time,” he said.

Moo, born in 1963 in Kampar, Perak, Malaysia, is the second child of a mechanical engineer and a housewife. He has an elder sister, two younger brothers and a younger sister. Younger brother, Allen (巫奇), had a short stint as a singer in the 1990s and is now running his own events company.

When Moo was eight, his mother died of an illness. The following year, the family moved to Singapore and his father remarried soon after.

His musical talent surfaced from a young age. When he was about five years old, he would be able to sing every song that he had heard over the radio, getting every note right. He sang the loudest in class and whenever his classmates went off pitch, he would wonder why other people “sang so badly”. But his parents were not musically inclined.

Moo joined the school band at Chinese High School where he learned to play the drums and the trumpet. He had literally stumbled upon a guitar at a friend’s place after school. He picked up the instrument and began strumming. He “thought it sounded great”, and began learning how to play it on his own. After three months, he could play and sing all the hit songs at that time.

He then made an offer to the owner of a shop selling guitars - Moo would conduct classes in the shop and split the profits with him. Moo, only 19 years old then, attributed this audacity to “a hunger born out of poverty”.

He went to Jurong Junior College after his O levels. One day, while listening to a song by the late singer Danny Chan (陈百强), he wondered if he could write a song too.

Picking a poem from the newspapers titled *Dream Lake* (《梦湖》), he composed a melody for it with his guitar in ten minutes.

But none of his classmates would believe that the simple but haunting song was written by him. “In those days, only people from overseas wrote songs,” he recounted.

Undeterred, he went on to write ten more songs. He was finally taken seriously and formed his first singing group, Underground Express (地下铁), with six of his classmates. They held a concert in school with borrowed guitars and sound systems, selling tickets at S\$1 each. Moo even printed copies of the scores of his songs and sold them at fifty cents each. The concert was a sold-out affair. It was there that Moo and his group were spotted by a Chinese radio DJ.

They were invited to record a few songs for the programme *New Voices, New Songs* (《歌韵新声》). By virtue of this exposure, the group’s song, *Chance Meeting* (《邂逅》), became the first local composition to make it to the 1983 Chinese pop charts before it was even commercially released.

Prior to that, Moo had already made up his mind to make singing his career and so did not sit for his A levels. “I was lousy in my studies. Why should I compete with other people using my worst asset instead of my best, which is music?” he reasoned.

From 1983 to 1986, he became a household name in Singapore and Malaysia, thanks to several hit albums like *21 Tomorrow* (《明天 21》) and *Under the Starry Sky* (《星空下》) that helped to launch the xinyao (新谣, Singapore Chinese ballads) movement. But while he enjoyed fame, he was struggling to make ends meet. He became a backup singer for many big name artistes, sang in pubs and got by on instant noodles. But these gigs brought him up close and personal with some of the top artistes of the day. He soaked up the experiences like a sponge.

Opportunity came knocking in 1986 by none other than retired Taiwanese superstar Liu Wen-cheng (刘文正), who had set up a new company and signed him up. But success eluded Moo.

He brought three of his albums to Taiwan, but his music failed to interest the distributor. He returned to Singapore, disappointed, but not defeated.

“My philosophy in life is, ‘I will become better’. I never give up and I never complain,” he says.

He persisted in breaking into the Taiwanese market. The big break he was hankering after finally came in 1988 after five albums that failed to lead anywhere. Ironically, it was his career frustrations which provided fodder for his songwriting that finally culminated in success.

He had shared his feelings with his close friend, lyricist Heng Cheng Hwa (邢增华), who translated those sentiments into lyrics. Moo then composed the melody for it. That song *You Are My Only One* (《你是我的唯一》) made him the hottest “newcomer” in Taiwan and Hong Kong. As a relative unknown then, he performed tirelessly at many school campuses to raise his profile.

“Thinking back, it was probably all pre-destined. I needed that journey. It toughened me up and made me resolute.”

The album that cemented his position was *Too Silly* (《太傻》) in 1994. Thanks to it, he became the first Asian to be awarded the Excellent Artistic Music Award by American Billboard, beating even Hong Kong singer Jacky Cheung (张学友) to it.

He was then invited to act in movies, clinching the Best New Performer Award at the Hong Kong Film Awards in 1996 for his debut role as a gangster in the movie *Those Were the Days* (《十三太保》).

He was at the top of his game, “There was no time to rest. I had to release four albums every year, two in Taiwan and another two in Hong Kong. Songwriting, album producing, publicity tours. I was working every single day.”

But his success continued to be fraught with difficulties. In 1994, he was sued by his ex-mentor Liu for using three songs owned by the latter in his album. Moo negotiated an out-of-court settlement of S\$980,000.

In 1998, he was slapped with a five-year ban after a work permit row which stopped him from performing in Taiwan. It was only lifted in 2000.

Crossing over to TV hosting in Taiwan at the end of 2004, the stint ended when he reportedly quit after a row with co-host Li Ming-yi.

He always chooses to look at the bright side of things though, “It’s a personal choice. Some people choose to focus on the negative. For example, when a glass is broken, some people would say, ‘Oh no, it’s broken.’ I would see it as, ‘Great, we can get a new one.’”

Since early 2006, Moo, known for his powerful and emotion-filled vocals, and who has released more than 40 albums and performed in as many concerts, shifted his focus to the China market. He has appeared as a host and judge on several high-profile shows in China, such as the reality singing competition “Super Girls” (《快乐女声》), making an impact and stirring up fresh controversy with his trademark acerbic comments.

He had joined the shows well-prepared. He read a few self-improvement books for tips on things like how to give compliments. “I went there with a wad of notes. Everyone else was so shocked because they didn’t do any homework. But it’d be so boring if you keep repeating the same things on air.”

“My friends told me not to take these shows so seriously, that they are merely entertainment. But these shows mean so much to the contestants. It’s about the pursuit of a dream. So I don’t see myself as just playing the role of a judge. I try to share with them my experience in music, singing and showmanship.”

He also performs regularly at company events and was last seen in fellow countryman, pop singer Ah Niu's movie directorial debut *Ice Kachang Puppy Love* (《初恋红豆冰》), playing the role of the father of the character played by actress Angelica Lee.

On his staying power in a fickle industry, which has since seen a switch in music taste and entry of many new young talents like Jay Chou, JJ Lin, David Tao, etc, "To be frank, this is the only thing I'm good at. People may say, singers are so determined and persistent. But really, all singers could do is sing. A construction worker is also determined. Problem is, tons of other people could do what he could do."

"Those who managed to last longer usually set very high standards for their work. They don't give up easily. I can spend six years working on an album. I won't release it till I'm completely satisfied with it. It's a torturous process. At some point, I realise that there is no such thing as perfection in artistic pursuits."

He has set up a music production company with the aim of nurturing new talents, "I have the network and experience. There are so many talent contests but no avenue for these potential artistes to cut their albums. I hope to be able to provide them such a platform. I can share with them my expertise and professional advice."

Moo, known for his romantic ballads, is looking at retiring from the music scene by the time he hits 55 years old, devoting his time then to charity work, "I may even become a pastor because I find true happiness in the work."

Following his heart seemed to be in line with the lesson he has learnt from close to 30 years in the music business. He said, "You have to be true to yourself when creating music. Being calculative doesn't guarantee success. The music that really moves hearts is the type that expresses one's true feelings. It must be a voice that comes from deep within the soul."

Quote

"When someone stands at the peak of a mountain and he sees all these peaks around him, the only way to get to the other peaks is to climb down and then back up again. This is what I've been doing." – Eric Moo on the ups and downs in his career

Awards

1986: Malaysia, *Top Ten Songs* for *Kopi-O*

1987: 1st Sing Music Awards (新乐奖), Singapore, *Best Performer Award* and *Best Achievement Award* for 《年轻的心》

1988: 2nd Sing Music Awards (新乐奖), Singapore, *Best Male Singer Award* and *Best Music Composition Award* for 《唱不完的爱情》

1988: Malaysia, *Top Ten Singers* (No 2 in Ranking)

- 1988:** Entertainment Association Awards (娱协奖), Malaysia, *Top Ten Songs, Best Music Composition and Best Performer Award*
- 1989:** Entertainment Association Awards (娱协奖), Malaysia, *Best Music Composition, Best Lyrics, Best Performer and five Best Song Award*
- 1989:** Malaysia, *Top Ten Singers* (No 2 in ranking)
- 1989:** 3rd Sing Music Awards (新乐奖), *Best Male Singer, Best Music Composition, Best Achievement* for 《你是我的唯一》
- 1989:** *China Times*, Taiwan, *Top Ten Songs* (9th in ranking) for 《你是我的唯一》
- 1990:** Malaysia, *Top Ten Singers* (No 2 in ranking)
- 1991:** Entertainment Association Awards (娱协奖), Malaysia, *Best Performer*
- 1992:** Entertainment Association Awards (娱协奖), Malaysia, *Best Song* (3 songs) and *Best Performer Award*
- 1992:** Malaysia, *Best Singer and Best Music Composition*
- 1993:** Malaysia, *Top Ten Singers* (No 1 in ranking)
- 1993:** Hit Awards (醉心金曲奖), Singapore, *Best Male Singer and Best Song* for 《红尘来去一场梦》
- 1993:** Hit Song Awards (热辣金曲奖), Singapore, *Best Local Singer, Top Ten Albums, Best Achievement in Songwriting, etc*
- 1994:** Hit Awards (醉心金曲奖), Singapore, *Best Male Singer and Best Music Composition* for 《太傻》
- 1994:** Entertainment Association Awards (娱协奖), Malaysia, *Best Singer, Best Music Composition, Best Song* for 《红尘来去一场梦》
- 1994:** Hong Kong Radio, *Best Original Song* for 《只想一生跟你走》
- 1994:** Nanjing Radio DJs, *Best Singer-Songwriter and Best Song* for 《太傻》
- 1994:** Shanghai Radio, *Top Ten Outstanding Young Persons Award*
- 1994:** American Billboard, Asia's *Excellent Artistic Music Award*

1994: Jade Solid Gold Awards, Hong Kong, *Most Popular Singer-Songwriter, Silver Award – Mandarin Category, Bronze Award – Male-Female Duet, Hit Song Award*

1996: Hong Kong Film Awards, *Best New Performer Award* for Movie – *Those Were the Days* (《十三太保》)

1996: Entertainment Association Awards (娱协奖), Malaysia, *Ruby Best Achievement Award*

1996: Esquire Magazine, Hong Kong, *Top Ten Gentlemen* (together with Chow Yun Fatt, Jackie Chan, Tony Leung Kar Fai, Aaron Kwok, etc)

1996: Jade Solid Gold Awards, Hong Kong, *Silver Award - Mandarin Category* for 《思念谁》

1996: Hong Kong Radio, *Top Ten Mandarin Hits – Bronze Award* for 《思念谁》

1997: Club Magazine, Japan, *Hong Kong Most Popular Movie Stars* (No 7 in ranking)

1997: Channel V, *Best Music Video* for 《思念谁》

1997: Golden Melody Awards (台湾金曲奖), Taiwan, *Best Global Chinese Male Singer* for 《我感觉不到你》

1997: 321Chinese Music Awards, Malaysia, *Best Singer-Songwriter Award*

1998: Malaysia, *Top Ten Singers (1980s – 1990s) Honourary Award*

2006: Guangzhou Radio Hit Awards 2006, China, *Meritorious Award*

Discography

Mandarin albums	
Year of Release	Title of Album
As part of Underground Express 地下铁	
1984	明天 21
	海蝶逐日
1985	星空下
Individual	
1985	心情
1986	年轻的心

1987	何必孤独
	唱不完的爱情
1988	等
	个性生活写真集 - 你是我的唯一
1989	爱是一种伤害 (奇迹)
	个性生活写真集 2 - 何必孤独
	为了你 (一个象我这样的男子)
1990	唱不完的情歌 - 巫启贤的柔情之旅
1991	伤心情话 (伤心的人更伤心)
	赤子心情 - 是否你曾偷偷的哭
	单恋 - 因为你 因为歌
1992	爱情启事 (回到自己身边)
	启贤 - 金曲珍藏
	我真的要走了
1993	红尘来去一场梦
	等你等到我心痛
1994	太傻 - 巫启贤情歌回顾展
	凑热闹
	爱情傀儡
	错 - 单恋 2
	轻轻的说声爱你
1995	爱那么重
	我想说的是唱不完的爱情
1996	思念谁
	我感觉不到你
	奇迹
	启蒙情歌
1997	贤言贤语
1998	启贤留文正
	I'm Yours 我是你的
2000	团圆
	感动
	太傻
2002	The Always Winding Road 都是路 弯弯
	几乎爱上你
2003	我真的要走了
	我的新谣时代
2007	老鼠已经爱上你
2009	女子经典

	相信未来
	为我们披上嫁衣
Cantonese albums	
1989	浪子心声
1994	太傻 - 巫启贤情歌回顾展
	心酸的情歌
1995	有心：只因你伤心
1996	风中有你
	因为你
Japanese Album	
1997	愿（如果这是你的心愿）
Compilations/Live albums	
1992	巫启贤极品集
1994	藏爱经典 – 最真最初的巫启贤
1996	巫启贤的傻情歌精选辑
	巫启贤作品集
	启蒙情歌精选
	经典音乐精华
1997	演唱会精选
1999	寻贤启事新选辑

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