

What a buzz

A hearing problem is one of many pitfalls that fails to stop Hanjin Tan enjoying a career in music, writes **Wong Yat-hei**



Photos: Gary Mak

GAME-CHANGERS

If Beethoven could write songs despite being deaf, then it is no surprise that music producer Hanjin Tan – who has had hearing problems ever since suffering an ear infection when he was 12 – has still managed to make his mark on the music industry.

"I don't go to places that are loud and won't sit in the front row of a concert because it will make my ears feel really uncomfortable, like having a buzzing in them," he says. "It affects me when I am mixing music, but the more I do it, the better I am."

Born in Singapore, Tan – now based in Hong Kong – is one of Asia's most sought-after singer-songwriters. But when he was young, very few people except him believed he had a talent for music.

"I love to sing – I would hum songs when swimming and I love listening to the radio," he says. "At primary school though, my teacher said: 'Hanjin loves to sing, but doesn't have a good voice.' My piano teacher even asked me to give

up because I was so bad." Secondary school was not much better for Tan. He went to junior high at Singapore's Anglo-Chinese School before transferring to a rival school, Raffles Institution, for his senior secondary education.

"I transferred to Raffles because I wanted to learn Japanese, but the course they offered was not what I wanted so I went back to the Anglo-Chinese School. Before that, I thought everyone was my friend, but everybody hated me because they thought I was a traitor for attending a rival school. I fell into a deep depression," he says.

Music was the only thing that could cheer him up. "At junior college [high school in Singapore], I was coached by a world-class conductor. I got to travel overseas to perform and it was a world-class music experience. I remained with the choir after I graduated," he says.

Like every Singaporean male, Tan went into the army after graduating from secondary school. He served as a combat engineer, trained to make explosives and clear mines.

"Army life was boring," he says. "My unit had the highest suicide rate because it was so strict. It was during this time that I started performing in public. In my free time, I would play the guitar and sing in pubs and bars. The first place I performed at was a hooker pick-up joint. Nobody was listening and I was paid S\$20 [about HK\$120] a night to play."

After the army, Tan studied economics at The National University of Singapore while continuing to perform at cafes and bars. "I was offered a chance to play at a café for S\$80 a night. My friends and I also organised mini-concerts. I just played whatever I wanted to there. It was fun," he says.

Tan's music eventually caught the attention of artists in Hong Kong. "I was approached to write songs for Jacky Cheung and that opened a lot of doors for me. Later, Eason Chan asked me to produce the album that brought me here," he says.



TAN'S TOP FIVE MUSICAL MUSES

AL SCHMITT "A recording engineer and record producer whose music-mixing inspires my work."

QUINCY JONES "He is a genius in arrangement. His ability to work with all kinds of bands, from an orchestra to a punk band, amazes me."

WILLIAM ORBIT "He is a very daring musician and his creativity is groundbreaking."

FRANK SINATRA "The way he sings is a great inspiration for how I perform."

UZ "Their style influences me a lot."

CAREER GUIDE

Post-offer pointers

Congratulations, you've been offered a new job! While the bulk of the hard work of applying and interviewing is behind you, a few crucial steps remain before everything is signed and sealed.

You probably need some time to think through the offer before going back to the company. Remain enthusiastic and thank them for the opportunity. Make sure to ask when the company needs a decision by – you should be given at least 24 hours to think over an offer – and ask for a written copy of the offer outlining the details and benefits package.

If you have questions about the package, prioritise them and get clarity from the company. A word of caution here – this conversation should happen over the phone or in person, as e-mails can appear more demanding than you'd think. If an employer sees an e-mail with a list of questions, they may seem like demands and it could put them off.

In addition to the numbers and figures, try to find out more about the role. Make sure you know who you will report to, as supervisors can make or break a job. Find out how you fit into the structure and ask if there are any projects they have in mind for you.

There is nothing wrong with negotiating aspects of the package, but you should avoid surprising the employer with a request that is out of tune with what the industry provides, or with what



Know who your supervisors are as they can make or break a job

you have indicated to date during any interviews. Once you are happy with the offer, agree to things verbally and sign the new contract before relocating or resigning from your current job.

Walter Ellicott, managing director, Ellicott Long Limited, recruiting professionals for the property and construction industries in Asia

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David Lam

Courtts

As managing director and North Asia head, Hong Kong-based Lam is responsible for private banking teams focused on Hong Kong, Greater China and the Philippines. "Given the business's increasingly integrated nature and growing sophistication of client demands, [Lam's] experience is invaluable in allowing us to accelerate strategic ambitions in this important region," says Alex Classen, CEO of Courtts International.



Gerald Lee

Amrop

Lee joins Amrop as partner, China. He was previously a partner and regional lead of supply chain and procurement for Asia at a UK global executive search firm and co-founded its Hong Kong office. Earlier, he was with a US global retained executive search firm, where he covered the industrial and natural-resources sectors and was responsible for research, and later management, of senior assignments.



Bob van den Oord

The Langham, Hong Kong

In addition to his new capacity as managing director, Van den Oord continues his role as vice-president of brands for the Langham Hospitality Group. With a distinguished career spanning over 20 years, Van den Oord will continue to lead the repositioning of The Langham, Hong Kong and take the property to the next level in terms of operational excellence, world-class brand management and innovative marketing.

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CAREER DOCTORS

Fork in the road to a successful future

I am an IT graduate who has worked in different industries for the past four years. However, I'm still at a junior level. I have good co-ordination and organisational skills, but lack project-management experience and want to take courses. What steps can I take to develop my career? MC



To advance your career, you need to have a clear idea of what your goals are, the personal skill sets in which you are strong, and the industry sector that interests you. Above these, you need to be determined to reach your goals.

Your area of interest seems to be in project or change management. To become a project manager, you need experience and it is common for employers to request additional qualifications such as Project Management Professional (PMP), Six Sigma or similar programmes. There are two paths you can take from here.

The first is to move into a business analyst role in a company or a consulting firm and start to participate in projects. From here, you can further develop your expertise in change management. Many large companies support employees in project roles to undertake Six Sigma certification. The type of business

analyst role you take will determine if it is more IT-focused or not.

The second option is to transition your career into the IT-vendor side. This will allow you to gain project co-ordination experience which can then develop into project management. You will gain client-facing exposure and the role will further develop your technical skills, which is good given your IT degree.

The other benefits of working on the IT vendor side is you will find the role has a good level of challenge and you will also be more widely exposed to IT products and solutions.

Mark Enticott is the managing director of Ambition Hong Kong, a leading global boutique recruitment firm with offices in Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia and London. Ambition specialises in the banking and financial services, finance and accounting, technology, and sales and marketing sectors.



For the full story, go to www.classifiedpost.com/careerdoctors

Jury's out on return to law

Due to marriage, family and relocation, I have not been in the workforce for almost 10 years. I graduated with a law degree in 2000 and worked in the field for a few years before relocating. What are my chances of getting back into the field after being away so long? I don't speak Cantonese or Putonghua. Sfier

The legal profession in Hong Kong is intensely competitive. Although it is not



impossible to re-enter, you need to be aware that, most likely, it will be very challenging after having been out of the market for so long. If you are committed to re-entering then you need to be willing to start almost from scratch and be prepared to work exceptionally hard.

Age is not the most critical factor, but relevant recent legal experience is very important to organisations when considering potential candidates.

At entry level, most law firms look for candidates with Chinese language skills and working knowledge that is recent and local. They will also look for willingness to put in a significant volume of hours and do routine, entry-level work. You will most likely be competing with newly qualified graduates with the necessary language skills who are more than willing to put in the work, as well as the hours, to get to the top.

Evaluate exactly what you want to achieve by re-entering the workforce. Discuss this with your peer group, seek out professional opinions on the options available and set yourself realistic goals.

If you remain committed then I would suggest networking extensively, as well as considering taking additional legal-related courses in Hong Kong. You can also apply for legal support roles to get a foot back in the market.

Christopher Aukland is regional director of Michael Page and Page Personnel in Hong Kong. Michael Page and Page Personnel are part of PageGroup, one of the world's leading recruitment companies, with operations in 156 offices in 34 countries worldwide.



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