



前卫华乐团“红”的夫妻档谢其龙和谢卓琳二鹿扶持,坚守艺术岗位,在普及现实考量的同时不忘传承初衷。(陈东雄摄)

新加坡国际艺术节和华语电影节已在上周四和周五拉开帷幕,带来多场优质艺术表演,为渴望更多艺术工作者的表演场地需求,政府去年宣布将在滨海艺术中心表演厅添一座中型剧院。上述例子显示,一度被戏称“文化沙漠”的新加坡已逐渐摆脱,艺术基础设施不断提升,艺术活动更百花齐放。

不过,2017年新加坡文化数据报告显示,2014年至2016年的本地文化艺术领域总就业人数在减少,每年跌幅介于2.6至3.2%。到底老一輩“艺术不能当饭吃”说法还成立吗?本期《大特写》邀来老中青三代艺术界人士,探讨艺术工作的苦与乐。



本地艺术工作者的苦与乐

沙漠披绿草

‘红’创办人: 创新成了‘绊脚石’

“我们玩乐器,但创作听起来不像典型华乐。成立最初面对的困难在于,很难让别人介绍我们给谁。因为何。”
前卫华乐团“红”创办人谢其龙(36岁)和谢卓琳(31岁)夫妇在位于月眠艺术中心(Goodman Arts Centre)的工作室受访时,身穿简约的灰黑素色调,流露出与音乐风格一样的前卫和个性。
两人从小学习华乐,会多种乐器和创作。谢其龙擅吹笛子,拥有上海音乐学院笛子演奏硕士学位。谢卓琳擅弹古筝,拥有香港中文大学音乐硕士学位,目前在国立教育学院攻读博士学位,研究18岁及以下幼儿对声音认知的课题。
两人在2011年成立“红”,以传统华乐演奏曲风多元,展现传统的后卫声,也会在国际艺术节与马来音乐组合NADA,视觉艺术家郑光合作呈现跨界艺术表演。
如此风格鲜明的演出丰富了本地的艺术创作类别,但创新也成了艺术道路上的“绊脚石”。
谢卓琳说:“政府决定是要给予空间和资助时,会先看你创作的是怎样的艺术。我们必须很努力争取存在本地艺术界的价值,以争取我们想要的空间。”

艺术 辟新路

两人过去受惠于国家艺术理事会孵化计划(Incubation Scheme),入行首三年租用工作室获得租金津贴,自爱受惠于艺术家计划(Artists Housing Scheme)和种子计划(Seed Grant),工作室租金和经营费用享有艺术津贴。
国家艺术理事会网站显示,本地至今有超过60个艺术组织或个人在上述计划下于34个地点设立工作室,包括艺公司旗下的阿里山艺术中心、史丹福艺术中心等。
谢其龙说,长期以来,某种艺术必须先在世界舞台上获得认同,已存在于艺术界,才能在新加坡获得认同,进行音乐也是如此。
他说,一般人多数只晓得新加坡华乐团等主流华乐演奏的风格。他在上海音乐学院攻读硕士时也曾因在演出中得进新式“健康”爵士风格,一度被认为“不是传统”。
幸与当时的系主任在国外受过训练,认为上述创作风格是该允许的。
“当我们为了演出去找赞助商时,他们会觉得我们演奏的不是华乐,所以不想支持。这也就是为什么我们考虑不同等级的创作。如果只做我们擅长的,就只能在国外生存。”
他举例,新加坡国际艺术节的演出适合艺术鉴赏力较成熟的观众,但他们也表演“艺术部落”等实验艺术表演。
妻对音乐的执着,夫妻俩一直怀着华乐,演奏反传统自创风格的作品,多年来在乐坛实践与梦想被认可。

谢其龙不讳言,也曾在这条路上经历过演出亏损,不知下一场有没有着落的日子。
“演出亏了3万元,你靠去那找钱填坑?这些都很现实的考量,从事艺术工作的人心境要很强,要有吃苦和冒险。身会有很多声音告诉你不同意,但听与不听,就在于你。”

全职艺术课程学生增加

国家艺术理事会数据显示,艺术会每年收到约150份到180份奖学金申请。
数据也显示,就读本地艺术专业文凭课程的全职学生入学人数,从2010年的3637名增至前年的5460名,大学艺术学士学位课程的全职学生入学人数也从2010年的1165名增至前年的1638名。显示越来越多本地年轻人寻求过程中展现对艺术的热爱。
拉萨尔艺术学院院长史蒂夫·迪克逊(Steve Dixon)认为,该院的教育最能媲美欧美一些最好的艺术学府,艺术专科教育也属全球领先地位。新加坡此时的艺术氛围正是艺术家追求艺术发展的最好时机。
他透露,申请到拉萨尔就读的本地学生逐年增加,完全与本地人口增长放量的趋势恰恰相反。
不过,尽管年轻艺术家热情不减,各类艺术节却越来越少,数据仍显示不少艺术工作者选择在近几年离开艺术界。
史蒂夫·迪克逊说,本地目前的艺术界百花齐放,蓬勃发展,但也给艺术家带来挑战,在争取观众方面带来竞争。
“值得欣慰的是,本地观众也在成长。与以往相比,艺术活动开始受到公众欢迎。”
他说,拉萨尔的国内声誉近年来稳定提升,与其他学府竞争时处于强有力的位置,一旦继续吸收最优秀的本地学生加入。
艺术理事会指出,艺术奖学金并非全是本地青年是否有意愿追求艺术的最佳标杆,很多人就没申请奖学金,也照样从事艺术事业。
艺术理事会颁发的奖学金有具体项目的,每年都会列出优先考量的事项,探讨内部有哪些需求。



吴秉明的作品“Pulse”获得母校英国诺福克艺术大学的肯定,日后希望担任全职艺术工作者。(诺福克艺术大学提供)



拉萨尔艺术学院院长史蒂夫·迪克逊。(拉萨尔艺术学院提供)



青年画家王洁怡希望未来能在国际和本地舞台发光发热,追求她热爱的艺术。(受访者提供)

23岁画家王洁怡 夺英国年轻艺术家奖

青年画家王洁怡挥笔刻画的摩洛哥屋顶,让她上个月荣获英国著名的Lynn Painter-Stainers年轻艺术家奖。
23岁的王洁怡是英国伦敦大学新莱德美术学院硕士,就读于绘画(Paintings)部。她对艺术的兴趣源自小学,儿时向往这名为业余水彩画家,后来开始学铅笔素描和水彩风景画,慢慢培养兴趣与日后的专长。
王洁怡是华中中学校友,课业和课外表现都优秀,求学时期就知道自己要什么,大学时就开始为购买优质材料和定购画计划。
为了大学作业作品,她可以连续几个月每天不眠不休,几乎每天花十几小时在校内作画。
她未来打算从事全职艺术工作。她说:“家人的支持给了我追梦的勇气和推动力。因为这样,我觉得没什么是不可能的失败,不管发生什么事,一切都能学习的过程。”

担心心念艺术 女儿会‘没饭吃’

新加坡艺术学院除了传授艺术知识与技能,也教授其他科目,让学生有能力选择其他的事业发展道路。家长则担忧因此担心女儿刘礼齐艺术会“没饭吃”。
二胡演奏者刘礼齐(19岁)是新加坡艺术学院(SOTA)的毕业生,继承了父母刘诗萍(47岁)和林素莲(47岁)对二胡演奏的兴趣,未来希望到台大杨森音乐学院创作(Composition)部。
刘诗萍说:“多数家长会想把孩子和自己医学、工程、会计等专业毕业的孩子作比较,但我认为,孩子应该先对自己做的事有热忱。”
林素莲认为,孩子如果有才华和热忱,就不要逼他们从事别的行业,不然最后可能只会表现平庸。
实践剧场艺术总监甄红虹受访时说:“家长的想法也必须改变。如果经济上不需要孩子工作,你希望孩子快乐,就让孩子听孩子,与他们展开对话。”
实践剧场目前的22名全职工作者中半数都是90后,甄红虹说,这或许和过去相比相对乐观,但对比而言,重点不是人行,而是能否保守。
“现在的剧场薪资和其他大学生初入职场的新资已差不多,几乎可以媲美……重点是,你是不是很想追求这个?你可以不顾一切阻碍,死心地追求吗?”



月眠艺术中心是本地其中一个孕育不少艺术家的摇篮,不少艺术家在艺术之家计划下获得租金津贴,于中心内租用工作室。(宋耀雄摄)

29岁吴秉明 黏土捏出未来

自认不是念书的料,水准仅考几门理科不及格,青年吴秉明,在父母支持下坚持艺术梦,一捏一弄,一转,在水与黏土间转出独特的未来。
吴秉明(29岁)个子不高,平时在陶艺室内工作扎着手马绳,十足艺术家范儿。
他目前就读拉萨尔艺术学院硕士学位课程,也是甘榜格南民众俱乐部陶艺导师。
从母校英国诺福克艺术大学毕业后回国,他的陶艺作品“Pulse”已获2015年全校艺术奖项肯定,囊括Bishop's Art Prize最高荣誉。
看似顺利的艺之梦,背后藏着父母无私的爱、导师耐心鼓励的分享。
吴秉明说:“我中学的成绩不理想,唯高中三时一幅玻璃珠作拿到好成绩,那是我人生中第一次拿到好成绩,一直都无法忘记。”
他透露,中四强考时的最佳六科成绩(L1RS)为40分,这不回理工学生的入学门槛。
有一天,父亲问他即将毕业了,以后想做什么,他当时说:“我想到南洋艺术学院念艺术。”
父亲当时就告诉他,以他当时的成绩,无法报考考艺术系。
他因此发愤图强,在O水准考到16分的最佳五科成绩(L1R4),符合报考南洋艺术学院的标准,他靠陶艺主修满分平均分4分的佳绩,还考到3.82高分。
南艺的导师刘礼仁更带着吴秉明走进陶艺界,去年病逝的陶艺家林华俊也给了吴秉明很多机会,带着他参展、教会他许多事。
吴秉明想读在心,计划硕士毕业后全职从事陶艺,包括教学和制作陶艺品。
“养活自己其实不难,有地方住,三餐温饱,能付账单,这不是迫不得已的。这一切变得困难的是对著华人的追求。”
但他认为,若追求过高档生活,艺术或许不是他该走的路。

聚舞坊创意总监: 好作品需时间酝酿

艺术工作者希望政府提供资助时减少流程,给予更多高质作品的资源与时间,也提供专业艺术家更多专业演出平台。
聚舞坊当代艺术团创意总监董道奇(36岁)刚结束民族舞剧《如斯如切》的演出工作,对获得许多正面回响感谢。
但道奇指出,因为经验和人脉有限,很多这类优秀作品在演出一次就再无上演,或稍晚改良后得到世界各地演出,这是很可惜的。
他说,在本地,要得到资助就必须证明舞蹈很活跃,就舞蹈而言,每两三个月就需创作新作品其实现很“压榨式”的运作方式。
“好作品需要时间酝酿,尽管在本地艺术环境中还得不稳定,但我们也要因艺术才继续下来,希望奠定好的基础让下一代走得更好。”
董道奇其实理解政府在批准资助时的指导原则,也赞同需要指导原则,但他也希望,政府可考虑深入了解每个团体的特性和潜力,给予更合适的帮助。如关键绩效指标(KPI)不设得太高,无论艺术团在这方面下功夫争取资助,就能有更多时间孕育好作品。
新加坡少儿爱乐交响乐团创办人兼主席李粉珍(64岁)则说,若希望艺术发展做得更好,艺术会可考虑资助所有专业艺术家的资料,资助培养他们,就靠领导提供艺术活动,也应鼓励让专业艺术家去做,才能提升本地艺术水平。
新加坡专业舞蹈家协会成员之一陈全全(60岁)则表示,戏剧表演不能全靠票房来维持,也需要企业资助。
除了面对许多艺术团在争取资助时的竞争,陈全全也透露,很多公司其实有愿意履行企业社会责任,也和医疗等领域相比,艺术并非他们要关注的领域,因此必须花更多时间去说服企业。

Oasis in the ‘cultural desert’: Blazing a trail for arts

The Singapore Festival of Arts (SIFA) and Singapore Chinese Film Festival opened last Thursday and Friday respectively with many high-quality arts shows in the programme.

In order to provide more performance venues for artists, the Government announced last year it was adding a new medium-sized theatre to the Esplanade Waterfront.

These are just some examples to illustrate that Singapore, once mocked as a ‘cultural desert’, has morphed via the continuous upgrading of her facilities for the arts, and the proliferation of arts events. But still, according to the Singapore Cultural Statistics of 2017, total employment in the local arts and cultural industry declined between 2014 and 2016 by 2.6% – 3.2%.

The older generation used to think an artist is destined for poverty. Does that still hold true? In Lianhe Wanbao’s big feature this week, we invite artists across three generations to examine the pains and joys in the arts profession.

By Song Hui Chun

When creativity becomes a “stumbling block”

Dressed in simple grey and black during the interview at their workshop in Goodman Arts Centre, the founders of SA The Collective (“SA”) – Xie Qilong, 36, and Xie Zhuoying, 31 – exuded edginess and individuality that resonated with their music style. According to them, “We play Chinese instruments, but our pieces do not sound like classical Chinese orchestra music. When we first established, it was difficult to introduce ourselves and our genre to people.”

The dynamic duo picked up Chinese music at a young age and are well-versed in several instruments. Xie Qilong is an accomplished flutist with a master’s degree in flute performance from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. Xie Zhuoying enjoys the Chinese zither and earned her master’s degree in music from the Chinese University of Hong Kong. She is currently obtaining her PhD from the National Institute of Education, researching on the topic of sound cognition of children aged 18 and below.

The married couple founded SA in 2011, using traditional Chinese instruments to portray avant-garde music across diverse genres. At this year’s SIFA, SA will team up with Malay music group NADA and visual artist Brandon Tay to present a multi-disciplinary performance.

Their refreshing style of performance adds an eclectic streak to the local arts scene. On the flip side though, their creativity has also become a stumbling block in their journey through the arts.

“When the Government decides on whether to give an artist a space or a grant, they will first look at what kind of art you are creating. To prove our value of existence in the local arts scene, we must thus fight for the space we want,” said Xie Zhuoying.

The couple received help from the National Arts Council’s (NAC) Incubation Scheme, and enjoyed a rent subsidy for their workshop in the first three years of their practice. They are currently on NAC’s Arts Housing Scheme and NAC’s Seed Grant, and are given subsidies for their operating expenses and lease.

Currently under NAC’s Arts Housing Scheme, there are more than 60 arts organisations and artists housed in 34 venues, including the Aliwal Arts Centre and Stamford Arts Centre.

Xie Qilong pointed out that for a long time, certain forms of art must first gain recognition on the world stage before they can be recognised in Singapore, even pop music. According to him, most people take their cue of what constitutes the mainstream Chinese music style through performances by the Singapore Chinese Orchestra. When he was doing his master’s degree at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, he was once perceived as “untraditional” for introducing a bassist and keyboardist into his performance to infuse it with jazz elements.

Fortunately for him, the faculty head then was trained overseas and thought that his creative style should be allowed.

“When we look for sponsors for our performances, many felt that what we are playing does not constitute Chinese music. They do not understand the music and hence are not willing to give their support. This is why it is crucial for us consider different levels of experimentation with our music. If we do only what we want to do, we can only survive abroad,” said Xie Qilong.

Giving an example, he said the performances featured by SIFA suit the tastes of audiences who have a more mature eye towards the arts and SA is thus able to freely explore music outside mainstream perimeters. In contrast, SA also takes on commercial jobs or heartland projects such as NAC’s Arts in Your Neighbourhood, where they have to arrange music that is more palatable to a wider audience.

More full-time arts programmes

According to statistics by the NAC, the statutory board receives between 150 and 180 applications for scholarships every year.

The figures also show that the total full-time enrolment in tertiary arts courses jumped from 3,637 in 2010 to 5,460 in 2016, and the number of full-time students enrolling in undergraduate art programmes rose from 1,165 in 2010

to 1,638 in 2016. Such figures are indicative that more young Singaporeans are demonstrating their passion towards the arts by pursuing an education with it.

Professor Steve Dixon, President of LASALLE College of the Arts, noted that the quality of education offered by LASALLE is on a par with some of the best arts schools in the West, and that an arts education is increasingly gaining widespread acceptance. In his opinion, there is no better time than the present for artists to pursue a career as the arts landscape in Singapore is at its best now.

He revealed that the number of local students applying into LASALLE has been increasing over the years, which completely defies the decreasing demographic trend that the local population is facing.

However, despite the unabated passion of arts lovers and the growing number of arts festivals, statistics show that many artists have exited the scene over the last few years.

Professor Dixon noted that although the arts and literary scene is booming, it also brings about new challenges as artists have to compete with each other for the same audience.

“Nevertheless, it is comforting to know that audiences have been maturing. Compared to the past, arts events are now more popular and well-attended among the public,” he said.

He also shared that the international standing of LASALLE has been rising steadily over the years, putting it in a strong position to compete with other schools to continuously take in the best of local and international students.

According to the NAC, the number of arts scholarships awarded is not an accurate benchmark to gauge the interest of local youths to pursue the arts as many who do not apply for said scholarships still go on to forge a career in the industry. The NAC is very specific about what it aims to achieve with its scholarships. Every year, NAC will list down considerations it would give priority to and examine the needs of the industry.

[only first half of the article was translated]