



V
is for
by Hazel Chung

VERSATILE

In a cosy, homely studio, musician Veronica Lee Duen-han sits casually in front of a mixing panel where she usually spends most of her time. From here, she not only expresses her great enthusiasm for the music industry but also the complex feelings she has about being labelled the “multi-functional woman”.

Lee, also known by her nickname “Veegay”, has been working in the music industry for over 15 years. She has taken part in almost all forms of performance, both on stage and behind the scenes, as a sound engineer, composer and a singer.

“When I compose, I work from nothing to everything all by myself; I feel extremely excited when I record

some really nice sounds or when my performance influences the audience,” Lee says with excitement.

Apart from bringing her personal satisfaction and enjoyment, these achievements have made her name familiar to numerous fans of independent music and mainstream pop in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The success has been hard-earned. After all, choosing a career as a professional musician is never an easy decision.

Lee graduated from the Department of Music of the Chinese University of Hong Kong with a major in composing in 1989. She says that although she had wanted to be a musician since she was a child, she toyed with other ideas too.

“My first dream was to work in the Hong Kong Observatory because I was interested in climates and geology. However, I think the idea is weird now because the work is actually quite boring,” Lee says.

Apart from working out her own preferences, there was a more practical problem she needed to deal with. Lee recalls that although her family did not oppose her choice to study music, they expressed their fears over her ability to make a living in the future.

Lee finally made up her mind to study music because she wanted to follow her idol, Lam Man-yi, a local female composer who was also trained in a music academy but went

**“I would not confine myself to either group.
I want to be an all-round producer and sound engineer.
Good music doesn’t have boundaries.”**

on to commercial success in pop music. Lam’s story gave Lee hope.

By the time she graduated, Lee had another dream - to become a sound engineer. So she continued her studies at the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Art. “I always like going to studios because I love electronic music. To me, it’s cool to play those giant recording equipment,” she says.

At that time, women sound engineers were rare, but Lee says she never encountered any difficulties because of her gender.

“I have no gender,” she jokes. “I am very boyish. The male colleagues say they don’t treat me as a girl. Besides, sound engineering is not physically demanding work. We even manage to use computers to facilitate our work now. There is actually no disadvantage for girls,” Lee explains.

That is not to say that Lee’s early career went as smoothly as she might have hoped. Her family’s fears came true, “I received very few jobs in the first two years after finishing my studies,” Lee says.

This situation changed little until Lee first met Anthony Wong Yiu-ming, one half of the influential 1980s pop duo Tat Ming Pair. Wong had become

a successful solo performer and producer after the group disbanded. After listening to Lee’s music, Wong recognised her talent and appreciated her passion. He invited her to produce an album in 1996.

Lee is now a core member of People Mountain People Sea, the production company founded by Wong in 1999, and of which he is currently the director.

It was at People Mountain People Sea that Lee started to participate fully in music production, rather than just on the sound recording she focused on before. Lee also became more actively involved in the independent music scene.

“Mainstream music is invested by others. But we have to pay for independent music ourselves. There is a slight difference between their styles,” Lee says.

She further explains that when she works for others, she has to take the boss’s requests and market factors into consideration. This inevitably affects the process of creation. Although she is not saying which one is better.

“I would not confine myself to either group. I want to be an all-round producer and sound engineer. Good music doesn’t have boundaries,” Lee says.

However, Lee does have a goal to help indie bands with what she knows and excels in, because they lack capital. “I would like to do the mixing and recording for them. Money is not an issue to me.

a successful solo performer and producer after the group disbanded. After listening to Lee’s music, Wong recognised her talent and appreciated her passion. He invited her to produce an album in 1996.

Lee is now a core member of People Mountain People Sea, the production company founded by Wong in 1999, and of which he is currently the director.

It was at People Mountain People Sea that Lee started to participate fully in music production, rather than just on the sound recording she focused on before. Lee also became more actively involved in the independent music scene.

“Mainstream music is invested by others. But we have to pay for independent music ourselves. There is a slight difference between their styles,” Lee says.

She further explains that when she works for others, she has to take the boss’s requests and market factors into consideration. This inevitably affects the process of creation. Although she is not saying which one is better.

“I would not confine myself to either group. I want to be an all-round producer and sound engineer. Good music doesn’t have boundaries,” Lee says.

However, Lee does have a goal to help indie bands with what she knows and excels in, because they lack capital. “I would like to do the mixing and recording for them. Money is not an issue to me.



Lee enjoys making both mainstream and indie music very much.

I would be very happy even if the pieces are published on MySpace (a social networking website) only,” she adds.

In addition to independent music, Lee also enjoys live shows very much. “Live performance is absolutely unique and irreplaceable because everything happens only in that particular moment,” she explains.

That is why Lee gladly accepts invitations to perform in concerts, even if her talents are not given full play. She regards her work at such events as a kind of service to the singers.

“I’m playing their music, not mine. I have to satisfy their requirements. Luckily all the singers I worked with appreciate and respect musicians very much and so I’m glad to have served them.”

For instance, Lee once received great satisfaction in producing concerts for famous local singer Eason Chan Yik-shun in 2006, and at 17, a young girl band, in 2009.

“I could feel a magic power there. I knew so definitely that the concerts are going to be classics. Everything was just so hyper!” she recalls.

Besides, Lee thinks cooperating with different artists is rewarding. For example, working with the veteran singer Rebecca Pan Di-hua last year was an unforgettable experience.

“She is such a legendary performer with good sense of hearing despite the fact that she’s already 80 years old! I learnt from her that artists should be more diverse and know how to adjust their communication methods to different audiences,” she says.

To gain more inspiration and keep improving herself, Lee tried to participate in different music projects in both Hong Kong and Taiwan. But she never stays long.

She explains that she wants to collaborate with more people to enrich her experiences so she does not bind herself with a certain group.

On the other hand, she also thinks it is not solely down to her whether she can stay in any group. “Like in a romantic relationship, you cannot make things work just by yourself.”

Luckily, Lee never feels depressed or tired of the music industry. “If I have a target in this industry, it is to stay here, even when I’m 90 years old. I really want to produce more high quality music,” says Lee.

She explains her inexhaustible passion comes mainly from the precious opportunities to work with her idols. Reviewing her 17-year career, she



Lee sometimes needs to practise for stage performance as well.

says that taking part in Anita Mui Yim-fong’s concert in 2002 was her most exciting experience.

Lee had regarded Mui as a big star ever since she was a little girl. Therefore she felt incredibly honoured to work with her. “Mui was just great! She was very charming on stage but extremely friendly in daily life. She cared for everyone.”

Having participated in quite a number of groups, Lee says the creative process is not as fun as people might think. “We lock ourselves up in the studio when we compose, it isn’t very interesting.” Lee says when she collaborates with the Taiwanese band Material Girls, they hardly ever meet. They communicate through the internet and record their parts separately.

“If I have a target in this industry, it is to stay here, even when I’m 90 years old.”

The work of a musician and technician can also be very hard. “Sound recording is probably the most difficult job in the whole music industry. I used to work 18 hours a day in the studio and had to sleep there. The pay is so low that it doesn’t compensate what you have contributed,” Lee says.

Lee once spent three months composing background music for a film. During the process, she says she had no social life at all and had to compete with time every day.

Maintaining a can-do attitude in so many different roles throughout the years, it is no surprise that Lee has earned the title of “multi-functional woman”.

It is a title Lee says she has had mixed feelings about. On one hand, she was glad because the term




Lee tries to engage in different kinds of music performance.

recognises her ability. However, she also felt a bit upset because she used to think people approached her only for her “multi-functions”. Sometimes, she would even think she does not have many friends.

Eventually Lee realised it was important for her to strike a balance between her private life and her busy work life. “After having a severe illness a few years ago, I now realise how important health is, so I won’t work overnight anymore, it’s not healthy at all,” she says.

She started developing interests outside of music in recent years, such as surfing, cycling and playing tennis. Her life no longer centres solely on music.

As she writes in her blog, she has also learnt some “life lessons” from her yoga coach. Lee says whenever she feels pain, she tries to put a smile on her face and forget all the suffering.

“In the past, I believed music was my life,” she says. “But now I know it’s not everything. My new hobbies allow me to meet more people other than musicians. They enrich my life. People now call me not only for work, but also for leisure activities and gatherings,” Lee says with a smile. 



Lee used to spend most of her time in the studio, even sleeping there.