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EXCLUSIVE

MUSIC TO SOOTHE THE SOUL

BY SANDRA YIM

Home-grown international artiste, Corrinne May reveals what makes her music resonate with her listeners.

“The river runs and the river hides
Out to the ocean and under the sky
I promise you, the answer will come
Hold on to patience and watch for the sign
Everything in its time.”

In times of trials and tribulations when we search for the answers we so desperately seek to find, it is a struggle to put everything into words and express ourselves. ‘Everything In Its Time’ is one of the many examples of how international artiste, Corrinne May, manages to string together her thoughts with such eloquence, grace and intricacy. Accompanied with a few musical instruments to complete the perfectly blended mix, she has managed to craft some of the most heartfelt songs that resonate with audiences all across the globe.

Finding Her Place In The World

In this fast-paced and competitive world where the ability to put food on the table may come at the expense of us giving up our once ambitious childhood dreams, Corrinne is one of the lucky few that has kept the flames of her childhood aspirations burning bright. “I have always loved music even as a little girl. I would often be singing songs around the house,” she reminisces about her earlier days.

Corrinne had her head start in music from an early age and was trained in classical piano when she was just five years old. She won her first songwriting competition at 15.

“It was a natural progression. Once I started writing my own songs and received some encouragement, I knew I just wanted to pursue it.”

Armed with an honours degree in English literature at the National University of Singapore (NUS), her devotion to words and music took her to Berklee College of Music in Boston where she graduated with a Bachelor of Music.

Not long after that, she embarked on her exciting journey as a bright-eyed aspiring artiste in Los Angeles and released her debut album Corrinne May in 2001, which featured the ballad ‘If You Didn’t Love Me’, co-written with iconic songwriters, Carole King and Carole Bayer Sager. The album was subsequently re-titled Fly Away and released in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan and Singapore. The title track’s music video was even featured on MTV Asia.

Honing Her Craft

A self-confessed inquisitive individual with an instinctive curiosity for what makes a person tick, one of Corrinne’s favourite places to write and spend her time is a coffee house in Los Angeles called Peet’s Coffee and Tea, where she likes to observe the people that visit the coffee house.

“I keep a journal and whatever I observe in life, like little things that strike me,” Corrinne shares. When writing her music, she tends to draw inspiration from her own personal life experiences, which she tactfully weaves into her lyrics.

“The best part about writing down and sharing my experiences is that sometimes I get listeners coming up and telling me that, ‘hey that was my experience too’. This whole shared experience and just knowing that there is someone out there who shares the same things as you is just great because it helps you realise that you are part of a bigger picture,” Corrinne adds.

It is no wonder that when you listen to her soulful music, you can relate so easily to her experiences. The gentle human touch coupled with her raw and genuine emotions that she incorporates into her lyrics are both soothing for the ears and the soul.

Streak Of Success

Her second album, *Safe in a Crazy World*, was released in 2005 and the songs 'Everything In Its Time', which was also co-written with Carole Bayer Sager, and 'Save Me' were featured in 'Chase', a local television series propelled the album to the top of the Singapore charts for two weeks. Following the album's success, Corrinne performed a string of sold-out concerts at the Esplanade Concert Hall and recital halls in Singapore.

2006 saw the release of the Christmas album *The Gift*. The Christmas concert held in conjunction with Corrinne performing on stage with a 24-piece choir, an 8-piece string ensemble and a full band. The concert, staged at the Esplanade Concert Hall was yet another sold-out success.

Beautiful Seed was her fourth album, released by Warner Music Singapore in August 2007, achieving a gold status within its first month. It also attained an impressive platinum status in Singapore, with sales exceeding 15,000. After debuting the material from the album at a sold-out concert in Singapore's 1,600-seat University Cultural Center Hall in August, Corrinne embarked on her very first tour of Japan, doing in-store shows to standing room crowds at the Tower Records locations in Tokyo, Osaka and Fukuoka. She also debuted songs from that album for her Los Angeles fans in a full-band concert at the 800-seater Aratani Theatre and performed at the Hotel Café, Genghis Cohen and Molly Malones.

In 2007, Corrinne received the Young Composer of the Year award and Wings of Excellence award from The Composers and Authors Society of Singapore (COMPASS), in recognition of her contributions to the Singapore and regional music scenes. She was also honoured by the NUS alumni, who presented her with the 'Outstanding Young Alumni Award'. In 2008, she represented Singapore at the MIDEM conference showcase in Cannes, France in 2008.

A living example that brings the phrase "generosity is giving more than you can, and pride is taking less than you need" to life, Corrinne often shares her voice with charitable causes. She sang at many fundraising concerts to raise funds for Caritas, the charitable arm of the Catholic Church in Singapore and performed for the International Volunteers Day at the Marina Barrage in December 2010.

Despite her natural affinity with music and soaring success, a career in the music industry was not always her top choice. "Growing up in practical-minded Singapore, I was swayed by the idea that maybe being a musician would be more of a hobby than a career, but I am glad that I could actually make a career out of music."

Corrinne even lightheartedly mentions that if she had not become a songwriter, it would have been fun to be an astronaut or an astronomer so she could look at the stars.

Speaking of stars, at the opening of *Gardens By the Bay* in 2012, Corrinne rubbed shoulders with superstar singer and songwriter Jason Mraz, where they both performed concerts in front of a crowd of thousands. Corrinne was the first local artiste to perform there and had just sprung back from a four-year long hiatus to promote her latest album, *Crooked Lines*.

Like many who get a little jittery before performing in front of a big crowd, Corrinne is no exception.

"Usually I will say a little prayer and then I will try to focus on the people and about what I can share with them. I try to perform with the intent that it is not about me, it is about how and what I can hopefully share with them. When I take the focus off myself, it is usually much easier and makes it more real," Corrinne reveals.

With five albums released, a list of sold out concerts, a collection of awards and her loving family that she so tenderly nurtures on a daily basis, the 42-year-old shows no signs of slowing down. In fact, she is currently in the midst of writing for her sixth album, which she hopes to record in Los Angeles this summer.

In Corrinne's fourth album you will find a song entitled 'Five Loaves And Two Fishes' with the ending verse:

"Take my fears and my inhibitions
All my burdens, my ambitions
You can use it all
No gift is too small."

As Corrinne humbly presents her gifts and talents to the world, she has definitely used all of them to their fullest potential. For that, the music industry has gained a beautiful and talented artiste and avid listeners around the world will forever be grateful for the ability to seek comfort in her soothing melodies. 🌸

