

People

Lawyer, Philanthropist and Harpist Michelle Chow Aims to Make Music Accessible to All

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Lawyer and philanthropist Michelle Chow has been sharing her love for the harp with underprivileged children since 2008. We find out why she decided to start her [charity](#) aimed at empowering the young.

When my friend introduced me to the harp 13 years ago, it wasn't a [popular instrument](#)," says Michelle Chow. "Only affluent families could afford lessons for their children. However, I fell in love with it immediately and started to learn it."

The harp appears in many [Disney](#) cartoons, says Chow, and it's a dream of many young girls to learn this elegant instrument. She says she feels extremely fortunate that she was at a stage in her life when she had the time and resources to learn how to play it.

"It's a beautiful instrument," she says, "and I love the music it makes. It makes me happy that I can bring the harp to schools, hospitals, elderly homes, churches and into the community – music connects everyone." As she could already play the piano, which in many ways is similar to the harp, it wasn't difficult for her to grasp the concept and learn the instrument, which she insists is quite versatile in spite of its soothing quality. "I particularly like the plucking and different effects one can do with the harp – you can even play jazz and rock music!"

Since her introduction to the harp, Chow wants the instrument to be available to all, irrespective of their economic background. “Music education, like all education,” she says, “should be available to everybody.” With a few friends, she founded Friends of the Harp (FOTH) to correct perceptions that the instrument is only be available for the wealthy; over the years the charity has empowered many students. “They not only learn how to play the harp, but also how to learn, which is a skill that’s transferrable to other studies,” says Chow.



Michelle Chow is also the co-founder of Friends of the Harp, a charity dedicated to empowering the underprivileged through music.

Chow cites an occasion a few years ago when FOTH sponsored a harp outreach event at the Alice Ho Miu Ling Nethersole Hospital for physically disabled students at the nearby SAHK Jockey Club Elaine Field School. “It was such a meaningful event for both parties – the students could use their new-found skills as a gesture of thanks to the medical staff at the hospital, and their parents were so proud of them.” Chow was deeply moved that such a seemingly small and simple event could bring the community together. “The young students gained confidence, knowing that they had the ability to give back and perform, and the hospital atrium was filled with music, laughter, loud applause, love and tears that afternoon. I’ll never forget that.”

As for young, budding philanthropists, Chow says that she sees many second- and third-generation scions following in their family footsteps to contribute to society. “They have many creative ways to make a bigger impact with their dollars,” she says. “Philanthropy can bind the family together and create a common topic at the dinner table. It can even provide training for youngsters to have a taste of running a business, as charity is about balance sheets and deliverables too.”

Lastly, for those looking to start learning how to play the harp, Chow has one piece of advice: “Don’t hesitate,” she says. “If you like something, you’ll do it well. Be patient – practise makes perfect! I often say that I practise like a devil to play like an angel.