

# Musician tunes in to lifelong learning



Music educator Vicknes Vinayak Veerappan, 46, drumming in his Bishan home studio last Wednesday. In 2017, he decided to first take up a diploma in law as a foundation for his subsequent degree. It gave him insight into copyright and intellectual property practices, and the knowledge served him well in music production projects. ST PHOTO: GIN TAY

**Going back to school meant a lifestyle change but it was a chance to upgrade himself and reset his career, he says**

Malavika Menon

Heading back to school at 43, professional musician Vicknes Vinayak Veerappan proves that age is not a limitation and learning is a lifelong journey.

Mr Vicknes has been a freelance instructor and a performer since 1994, but it was his interaction with a student that motivated him to become a full-time educator.

Devoting himself to his classes, his monthly earnings dwindled to a quarter of what they used to be. But the now 46-year-old persevered and graduated in April from Lasalle College of the Arts with a Bachelor of Arts in music, validated by Goldsmiths at the University of London.

Mr Vicknes says getting back to school has been worth the effort.

"I was the second-oldest student in my degree programme. Despite the complete overhaul to my lifestyle, I do not regret my choice because this was a rare window of opportunity to upgrade myself and reset my career. I was determined to see it through," he says.

Mr Vicknes' passion for drums began in 1987, when as a student, he joined Bowen Secondary School's military band.

Eventually, he became a professional musician, performing on Asia tours with the likes of singer-songwriters J. Lin and David Tao.

While his performances took him across the globe, it was the teaching stints back home that struck a chord with him.

As a freelance instructor, he started teaching music to students at Singapore's mainstream schools in 2004.

Recalls Mr Vicknes: "When I taught classes, I took note of the mischievous students – like this boy standing outside – and made sure they sat in the first row for my lesson. When he was made music class leader, the boy had no choice but to be accountable to his classmates, and he put in a good effort."

The student eventually performed in front of the school assembly with his peers and rushed to give his music teacher a hug after the show.

"He told me, 'thank you for giving me a chance when others did not'. That incident was a turning point for me. I loved children and I knew I had the potential to reach out to more kids as an educator," says Mr Vicknes.

STRIKING THE RIGHT NOTE

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**MR VICKNES VINAYAK VEERAPPAN**, who began teaching music at mainstream schools as a freelance instructor in 2004.

In 2017, he decided to first take up a diploma in law as a foundation for his subsequent degree.

The course lasted slightly less than a year and gave Mr Vicknes insight into copyright and intellectual property practices. This knowledge would serve him well in music production projects.

As he took up fewer gigs and teaching stints to make time for his studies, Mr Vicknes saw his monthly earnings fall from about \$4,000 to about \$1,000.

His family was supportive and his parents watched over his 15-year-old son outside school hours.

Mr Vicknes consulted with Lasalle on the best way to finance his music degree, which included availing himself of the SkillsFuture Mid-Career Enhanced Subsidy for about 90 per cent of his fees.

He turned to bursaries and his sister's Central Provident Fund account for the remaining amount.

"As senior students, we have many options to finance our studies. Based on my experience, I have encouraged others to find courage and not be demoralised while seeking out new courses," says Mr Vicknes.

While juggling responsibilities alongside his classes was taxing, he recalls one unexpected instance that brought some good cheer: he received a student concession card for his commute.

"I had not been on student fare since my school days and here I was using it for my journeys again. It was a pleasant surprise," he says.

Going into his final year, Mr Vicknes saw Covid-19 cause painful disruptions in all sectors, including the arts industry, in Singapore.

Now a freshly-minted graduate with a music degree, he is encouraging senior musicians like himself to take up courses while they weather the outbreak.

"I experienced a similar impact as the one brought by this pandemic a few years ago when I was attending classes and I could not work or earn as much as I used to," says Mr Vicknes.

"I understand what my friends are going through now. But I remind them that we are not born musicians, we become musicians.

"Your talent has to be brought out through training and hard work. This is not the end of the world, it is a chance to learn more and take up new opportunities," he adds.

Asked if he is ready to put his books away for now, he says no. With his sights set on a teaching traineeship, Mr Vicknes is just getting started.

mmala@spn.com.sg