

EDUCATION



(From far left) Ms Michelle Ler was handpicked to be assistant musical director for the 2019 Australian touring production of Grease - The Arena Experience; Mr Eshan Denipitiya, who plays the piano and loves experimenting with styles and genres outside his classical forte, has performed at sold-out concerts in Australia with a Sri Lankan symphony orchestra; and Ms Nicole-Danielle Francis, who is now working at Lucasfilm, has had her short animation film accepted into international film festivals. ST PHOTO: SYAMIL SAPARI

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The Writing Coach
Felix Cheong has published 13 books across different genres, from poetry to short stories. Recipient of the Young Artist award, he has worked in the media industry for more than 20 years. He holds a master's degree in creative writing and currently teaches journalism at the University of Newcastle and Murdoch University.



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LASALLE GRADS ON A GLOBAL STAGE

Trio taking steps to realise their dreams in film-making, music and musical production

Jolene Ang

It was not the Force that drew Ms Nicole-Danielle Francis to Lucasfilm. In fact, she has not watched a single Star Wars movie. It was the work culture as well as opportunities to hone her animation skills and pursue her dream of making her own films that led her to Industrial Light & Magic (ILM) Singapore two months ago. Ms Francis, 28, joined ILM, a division of the Lucasfilm production company acquired by Disney in 2012, as an executive assistant after graduating recently from Lasalle College of the Arts with a diploma in animation. At Lasalle, she made a short animation film, Tightrope, which was accepted into four international film festivals, including the Cardiff International Film Festival 2017. The film is about a child balancing on a tightrope and is meant to symbolise children's struggles to balance their physical and emotional health amid pressures from the people around them. Ms Francis, who is of Eurasian descent and born in Malaysia, said she wants to create stories that can evoke emotion in her audiences. She had worked in advertising for three years after getting a degree in psychology and marketing

from Monash University. But she was not happy with what she was doing and decided to take up animation as she has always been interested in it, and she also loves reading and writing. At ILM, some of the artists shoot their own music videos on the side, she said, and ILM is supportive of them though the work is not associated with the company. She said of her ambitions: "I want people to come out, after watching something I made, asking all kinds of questions. Even if it's 'What did I just watch?', that's enough."

LIVING THE DREAM
 "Summer dreams ripped at the seams, but oh, those summer nights," so goes the song Summer Nights from Grease. It is Ms Michelle Ler's favourite song from the musical. But far from ripping her dreams at the seams, she's living them out. As a child, she used to watch Grease with her parents, who were big fans. Next January, the 22-year-old will be spending two weeks in Perth as an assistant musical director for the 2019 Australian touring production of Grease - The Arena Experience, where she will manage over 1,000 performers. Ms Ler, a musical theatre student, was handpicked in February

by the production's music director Dennett Hudson, who was working with her and other Lasalle students on one of their final-year projects. The Australian rendition of Grease is on a much larger scale. As its name suggests, it will be performed in an arena, or a stadium of sorts, as opposed to a traditional music hall. An amateur mass ensemble of more than 800 performers, including children, will be involved. Ms Ler has tried her hand at performing and music directing. She prefers the latter, because she does not like being in the limelight. Said Ms Ler, who read music at the O and A levels: "A piano recital feels too exposed, like I'm trying to show people something. "Musical directors double as rehearsal pianists, so they get to accompany singers. I feel more purposeful that way."

MODERN-DAY MOZART
 Music runs in Mr Eshan Denipitiya's blood. His grandfather played the Hawaiian guitar, which is commonly used in country music. His father is a music director who has experience with shows like Sirasa Super Stars, or Sri Lanka's version of American Idol. Mr Denipitiya, 23, a Sri Lankan, graduated top of his Bachelor of Arts in Music class at Lasalle. He plays the piano, and loves experimenting with different styles and genres outside of classical, which is his forte. "I believe classical music can show you everything a piano is capable of doing," he said. "But I want to bring my own style to classical, make it relatable to people and capture a wider audience." His fusion work ranges from electronic dance music mixed with classical piano, to Sri Lankan folk tunes combined with Mozart's pieces, and even Nokia ringtones played in the style of Chopin. In 2016, he performed at sold-out concerts in Sydney and Melbourne with his father's symphony orchestra from Sri Lanka. But he hopes to stage his very own concert one day, based on his fusion pieces. "I believe there's something in every genre," said Mr Denipitiya, who is currently a full-time piano teacher based in Singapore. "If you know how to improvise on a piece, there's nothing limiting you, and you have a freedom to find your voice."

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