



## An unfading tune

Hong Kong's humorist meets Spencer Lee, the systems engineer-turned-CPA with a love for music

**L**ike most young people, Spencer Lee Siu-pun enjoyed music. In his early teens, he tried a range of instruments, including acoustic and electric guitar, drums, harmonica and erhu, but he felt that he was never good enough to play any of them professionally. Although he loved listening to music and could sing, music would not be his career. So what would he do?

His parents were not rich, but they were inspiring. Spencer's father, for example, had not even graduated from secondary school, but still managed to support a big family (a wife, three children and a pair of grandparents) and study in his spare time. Today, Mr. Lee Senior is more than 80 years old, yet continues to run a successful trading business.

With such excellent role models at home, it was inevitable that Spencer would study hard and get into university. He did an undergraduate major in Management Information Systems at the University of Texas at Austin.

The course should have led him into a computing career, but that college was famed for its accounting programme, and he made friends with many trainee accountants. That planted an idea in his mind.

His first job was as a systems engineer for a computing service company in Los Angeles, but the seed was growing. Less than a year later, he realized that a financial career was calling for him. He resigned to do a full-time MBA programme at the University of Southern California. After graduation, he joined a furniture wholesaler run by one of his classmates, and worked on the finance side.

It was about 20 years ago that his life took a dramatic change of direction. He was married by then, and both he and his wife had aging parents in Hong Kong. It was time to come home.

That was in 1996. He received two offers at the same time – one in a restaurant chain, and the other to work as financial controller at the Composers and Authors Society of Hong Kong, known as CASH. The young man had never lost his love of music, so he knew what to choose.

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A few years later, he attained the CPA qualification, although he had never worked in a traditional Big Four accountancy role.

Today, 20 years later, Spencer is the Deputy CEO and Head of Financial Control at CASH.

“The job is fascinating,” he says. “Not only do I have a chance to meet a lot of interesting and artistic people in the creative industry, but also executives from different industries that use music in the course of their business, such as retail, hotel, cinema, broadcasting, digital music platforms, etc.”

It's not all desk work though. He has delivered numerous talks to

professional bodies, governments, universities, secondary schools, and so on.

Collecting and distributing royalties is not an easy task, but the Hong Kong organization has a great reputation. One Hong Kong celebrity told Spencer that she had only composed a single song 25 years ago, but still received royalties for it.

Spencer also played a key role in the establishment of digital music downloading in the region.

However, there's more to life than work. The music rights expert is shortly to celebrate his 30th wedding anniversary (his wife is a tax accountant), and his son has just graduated from university with a major in economics.

Spencer's interests have gradually come together. These days, he has a range of new hobbies, from golf to weight training, but there's one interest that has never left him: listening to music.

For this CPA, life has meandered like a line of melody, which is fine. Spencer likes to quote the 19th century novelist Samuel Butler: “Life is like music; it must be composed by ear, feeling, and instinct, not by rule.”



### **Nury Vittachi**

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