







News

## They use music to encourage others to talk about mental health conditions

These musicians are striving to inform others about mental health conditions and eliminate the stigma surrounding seeking help for them.



Ryan Teo  
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Music is many things to many people. It thrills the soul, raises our spirits and soothes the savage beast. And it is a great healer as well.

This was what co-founder Eileen Chai and her husband Ben Kranen had in mind when they founded the [3am Music Collective](#) in 2019. Their aim? To raise awareness about mental health conditions and to allow sufferers to get help without fear or judgement.

### Musicians coming together with a purpose

This decision wasn't just a way of giving back to those who needed help, it was also prompted by their own experiences with mental health conditions.



From left: Eileen Chai, Ben Kranen, Ng Yu-Ying and Ivan Lim.

"The reason why we even started this was because he (Ben) saw me suffering... Then I sought help and I got better. So that's why we thought 'okay let's do something about it, and since we all love to make music so why not we do it through music?'" says Eileen, 42, a violin teacher who also started a ground-up movement of young musicians called [Strings for Kindness](#).

Ben, 57, flavourist by day and guitarist and songwriter by night, adds that as musicians, they want to provide people with hope and an opportunity to reflect on themselves. At the same time, the group also aims to allow people to be able to seek help for their mental health conditions without feeling ashamed.

3am Music Collective recently released the last song of a 10-song cycle consisting of music from an array of different genres ranging from metal to instrumental.

These songs may have come from different genres but form a single narrative. What differs this cycle from most others is that it comes out of a collaboration of many artists. This includes local singing duo Jack and Rai, Eugene Yip from a cappella group MiCapella and singer-songwriter Roy Li Fei Hui who composed and wrote the lyrics for one song.

You can listen to the cycle on [Spotify](#), [Apple Music](#) and [YouTube](#).



Jack and Rai at one of the rehearsals. Image source: Facebook / 3am Music Collective

"Music sets a mood, an atmosphere. So this song cycle in a way is a reflection of our very depressing days right now," says Ivan Lim, 54, a writer and member of the group who plays the classical guitar.

"It's a story of triumph, and what the person goes through and how he addresses his own feelings. There are angst moments in the song cycle, there are reflective moments and at the end there is a sort of epiphany... So in a way this is a cycle of hope for us."

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### Challenges of Covid-19

Planned last year, the song cycle's creation process hit some obstacles when the pandemic hit. Almost overnight, it changed how the artists could collaborate, not to mention taking an economic, emotional and mental toll.

Ivan tells The Pride: "Things happened along the way and the personnel has also changed and then this thing called Covid came along. So we had to get replacements, in a hurry sometimes."

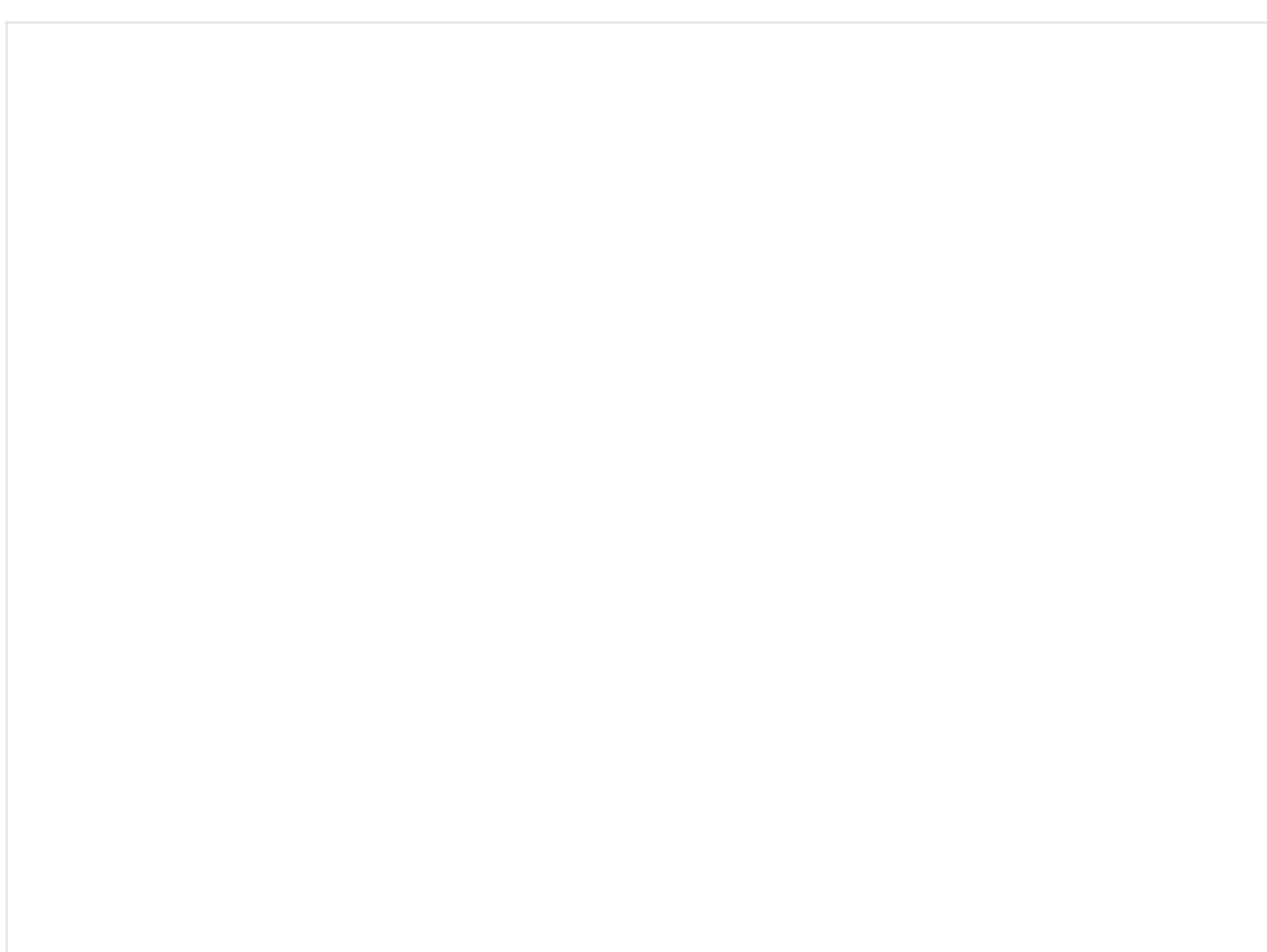
Even though Singapore has weathered the storm so far, there is no doubt that Covid has changed the way we live our lives, sometimes irrevocably so. Yet sometimes, many people, perhaps out of a fear of embarrassment or a sense of denial, try to pretend as if everything is okay. Even when under the surface, cracks are starting to form.

Daniel Chai, 49, a guitarist for the group explains: "(The difference between) what seems normal and what is underneath is actually very extreme... In our industry, music wise, there are so many people out of work but you don't see it."

Which is why the group believes what they are doing is so important. Eileen shares: "When you are a musician, you can feel the music yourself when you play. So when you can feel it somebody who is listening will definitely be able to feel the music as well."

Daniel also adds: "There's something in there (the song cycle) for everyone. If there is something relevant to you and whatever you are going through especially during this Covid period, there will be something that you can get out of the lyrics."

This is especially true now since Singapore is only in Phase 2 of its reopening.



Daniel Chai has played in the live band for shows like Singapore Idol and concerts of Dick Lee and JJ Lin. Image Source: Facebook / 3am Music Collective

Even though Health Minister Gan Kim Yong announced yesterday that the [capacity for weddings and worship services have increased from 50 to 100 people, including plans to move into Phase 3 on the horizon](#), people are unable to go outdoors to attend concerts or events. Instead, they can only go out in small groups due to safe distancing measures. Without that energy to feed off, this has affected how musicians perform their craft.

Ng Yu-Ying, 52, first violin and co-founder of the Tang Quartet, who is also a member of the group said: "Once you don't have a live audience, you're suddenly just lost. You don't have that vibe that you get from standing on a stage... So it's a huge learning curve for musicians like us."

### On the bright side

Nevertheless, there have been silver linings in the new normal. For example, the pandemic has given people a chance to take a step back from the usual hustle and bustle to check in on their mental health.

Eileen says: "I think it is a good time for many people to do self-reflection... Although [Covid-19] is tough for everybody, I think there is a silver lining because you have time to take a step back and be with yourself to ask 'Do I need help? What's my next step?'"

There are also online events that people can attend from the comfort of their homes. One such event is the Beyond The Label (BTL) Fest where the 3am Music Collective will be performing its 10-song cycle live for the first time.

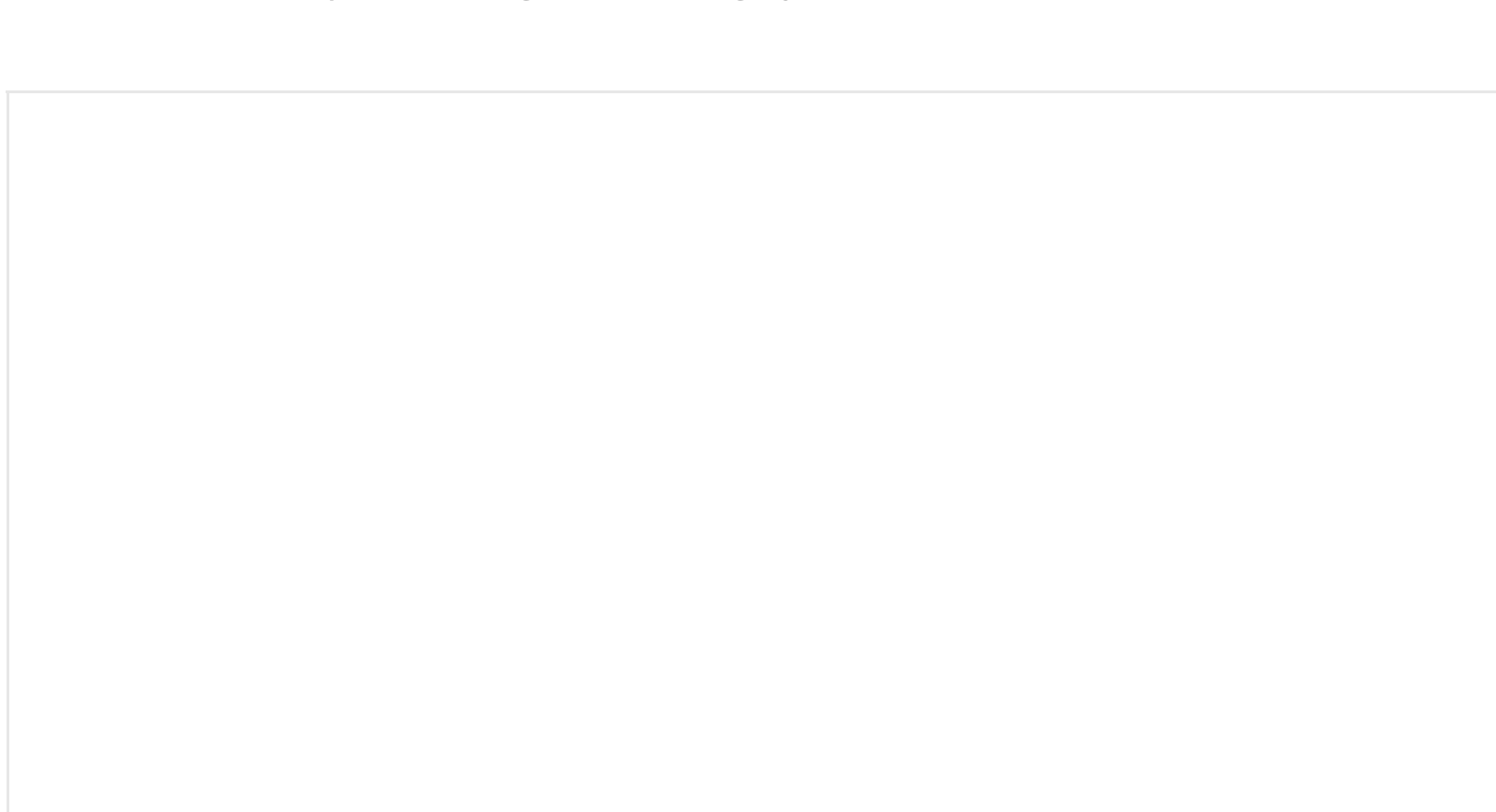


Image Source: Facebook / Beyond The Label

The two-day event by the National Council of Social Service (NCSS) aims to promote mental well-being through activities and workshops. The campaign will be on Sept 26 and 27 and the 3am Music Collective will be performing on the second day. Full details can be found [here](#).

"We've been wanting to stage this concert for some time, we were just wondering how. So when NCSS reached out to us, we had a discussion and thought that our message aligned with them so we decided to join," Ivan explains.

Ben adds: "We've always had ideas about going on stage, organising a big event ... and finally we came to this online version."

The 3am Music Collective continues to spread its message through its music and online platforms. The members hope to provide support to anyone suffering from mental health conditions and encourage them to take that leap of faith and embark on the journey of recovery.

"[Depression] is not something that ... will just go away. It's a really long process and is something that is very difficult to overcome," Daniel says.





Yu-Ying also said: "I think whether it's pop music or classical music, good music is good music ... If it's good music it will reach your heart and that's very important for healing to start."

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