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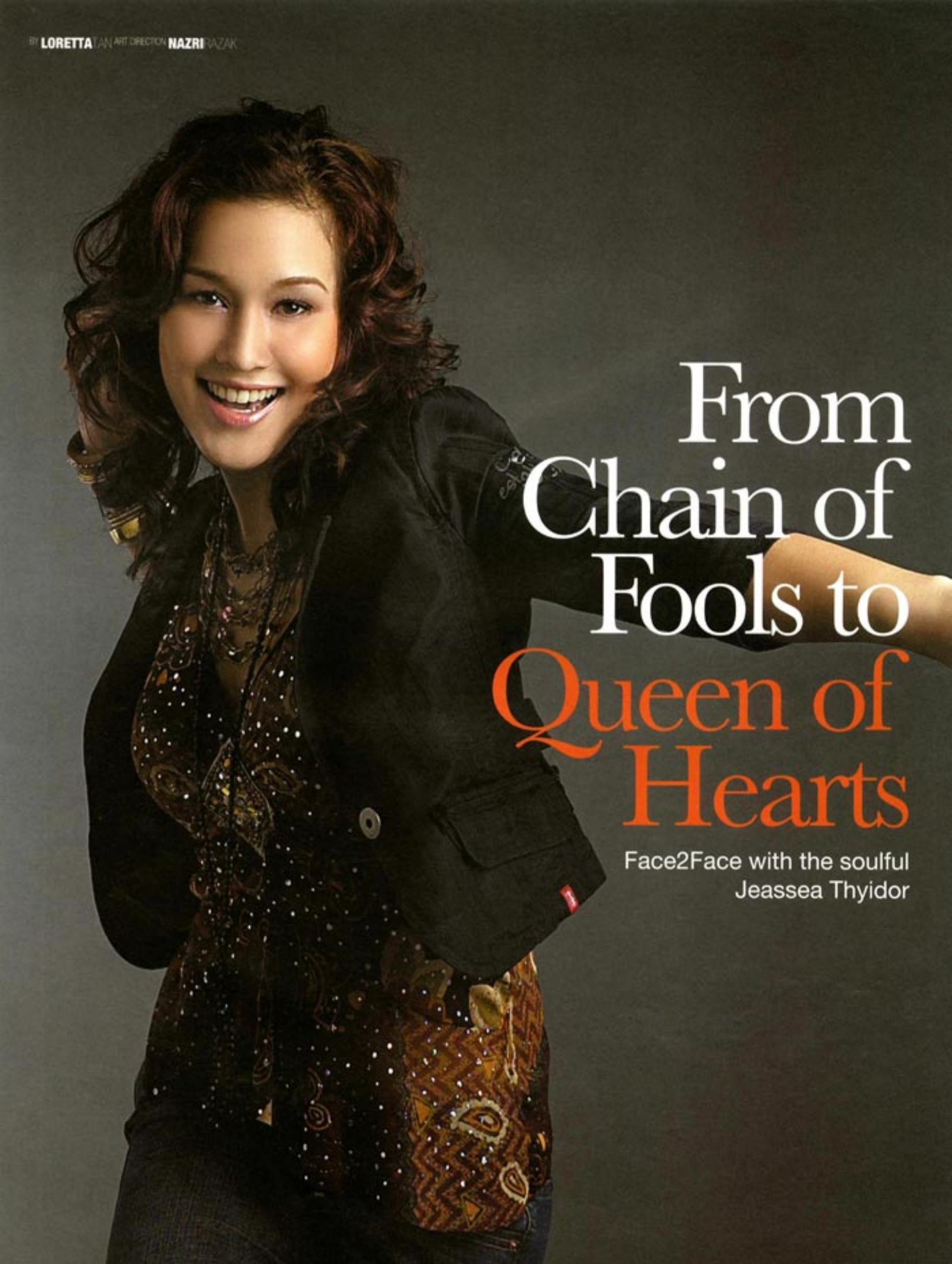
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BY LORETTA TAN ART DIRECTION MAZRI SAZAK



From Chain of Fools to Queen of Hearts

Face2Face with the soulful
Jeasea Thydor



"Chain Chain Chain... Chain Chain Chain..."

I distinctly remember those words being sung as I sat through dinner during the *Singapore Idol* semi-finals – it was less of the words jolting me into attention than the way it was sung. It was jazzy yet sultry and very, very powerful. That was my first encounter with *Singapore Idol* finalist Jeasea K Thyidor. I recall even Mr Dick Lee was impressed with the lanky singer.

Sitting inside Coffee Bean at Holland Village, Jeasea does not have that swanky hat or her mile-high boots, but she has very much the makings of a newly minted star. With a pair of pale-pink sunglasses perched on her pretty head, Jeasea scarcely looks like the 25-year-old that she is.

Humble Beginnings

While many of us were still lugging heavy textbooks to school and being ferried home by daddy and mummy, Jeasea was already singing at the tender age of 10 and had even formed an all-girl groupie known as "The Green Gloves".

Some years later, she joined her first band at 16 and went on to sing at several local events, weddings and clubs. Her first group was called "Soft Touch". She recalls with a giggle, "Don't laugh! I know it sounds like a sanitary pad or a tampon, right! But we were little then!"

Although the name of her group does draw peals of laughter, the issues she explored

in her music were very real and gritty almost. In a bid to pursue her music career, at the age of 18, Jeasea left her hometown of Vancouver for Toronto. In hindsight, Jeasea recognises that those years summoned her strength while accenting her vulnerability.

"My parents divorced when I was 13 and that proved to be a major issue that I would explore in my music." Her own string of heartbreaks with manipulative boyfriends also provided the soul and heart to her music.

"When I left home, I wanted to make it work and took up jobs as a retail store assistant and as a waitress. It was very stressful but I gave it my all. These experiences together with the search for my own voice and identity placed me in a very dark space. But I knew I wanted to prove a point – that I could make ends meet... and make it..."

Hard lessons in life indeed? Jeasea seems to take it all in her stride and offers her philosophy on life: "Yes, it was a hard time but I have a theory – that there are two kinds of people. Those who learn about life through their friends, and those who learn about life by themselves. I am, of course, the latter."

Six Days Seven Nights (and No Rest!)

And live she did. Jeasea's hard work and perseverance paid off. In 1999, her group cut an album and Jeasea even had the chance to be a presenter on the Dora Mavor Moore Awards. With an appetite for challenges and a zest for life, Jeasea went on to secure the lead role of "Ananda" (or Enlightenment) in the musical *The Buddha*.

"It was the single most defining moment of my life. Sitting there on stage, I had to project the impression that I was being enlightened. And without doing very much, I knew I had the 'aura'. I could feel it and I think the audience could see it too. It was an amazing experience and I would safely call that the 'pinnacle' of my career."

By 2001, Jeasea had returned to her hometown in Vancouver and joined several groups as a lead singer. Once again, those experiences singing with various groups at less than luxurious settings and hours honed her survival instincts.

"It was not always easy as singing and making music requires chemistry. Ever so often, you get one band member in the group that just

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'Chain Chain Chain...' The way she sang the words was jazzy yet sultry and very, very powerful.