

January 2005

# CHOICES

For Life!

## The Sun rises again

Face2Face with  
Asia's Singing Sensation  
Stefanie Sun

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By Loretta TAN • Design Tony YEO • Photos by Warner Music

“While we always know Calcutta is poor, you’re never really prepared for it until you see it for yourself.”

- Stefanie after a trip to Calcutta during her sabbatical



# The Sun rises again



## Face2Face with Asia’s Singing Sensation Stefanie Sun

Ladies and Gentlemen, please be on your feet and put your hands together to welcome our dashing guest, the all new, all bright, all cheery - New Year 2005! Before you can even scream “Aiyah, not yet ready!” It is already 2005.

What once used to sound like a title of a best selling sci-fi novel is now a reality. Indeed, a new year often brings with it one or a combination of the following actions:

- Disbelief** Epitomised by utterances such as – “What? So fast, I’ve nothing to wear to lecture yet!” or “My braces are still not out yet!”
- Relief** “No more cramming for “A” levels!” and/or “Phew, finally paid off my phone bill from voting Taufik!”
- Belief** “I’ll lose all the weight piled on from Christmas” or “I’ve lost all the weight piled on from Christmas.”
- Turn Over A New Leaf**

OK, this last one was put in because it rhymed. But still, one cannot deny the New Year brings with it a sense of renewal, rejuvenation and revitalisation. And, no one else would know this better than the reigning Princess of Asian Pop, Stefanie Sun, fresh from her sabbatical.



Dubbed by the Taiwanese as the “21st Century Genius Singer”, Stefanie Sun is a picture of bright cheery sunshine (pardon the pun) as she breezed into the dimly lit Brix in the basement of the Grand Hyatt, despite being decked from head to toe in black.

In a word, my first impression of her was quite simply “unassuming”. In fact, so unassuming was she I had no clue that the uber-famous Ms Sun had just plonked all of her waiflike 42kg weight (or lack of) right next to me until the cameras started clicking away ferociously.

Back in 2000, she announced her arrival onto the regional pop scene with a brazen slogan – “I am Stefanie Sun” and went on to sell over 3 million copies of all her successive albums.

Stefanie was unstoppable. Her meteoric rise was aptly termed “The Sun Yan Zi Phenomenon”. Yet today, just a mere four years on, her eighth album is simply entitled “Stefanie” – almost like her entrance to the interview, elegant yet unassuming. Perhaps the years passed have indeed mellowed the luminous star. But as we are to soon find out, Stefanie is more radiant and happier than ever before – and we at CHOICES plan to find out how this Sun keeps burning bright.

### Her First Step

Having played the piano since she was 5, many immediately assume that Stefanie came from a music family. On the contrary, Stefanie affectionately confesses that her mother is tone-deaf whilst the closest her father comes to music is his repeat play Mandarin ballads.

But it was their support that led her to take on a career in the uncharted waters of singing. Yet, Stefanie did not always know she wanted to do music. In fact, it was not until she signed on the dotted lines of her contract that she made up her mind to pursue music wholeheartedly.

With her signature on the line, Stefanie made sure she had to deliver to the people who trusted and supported her. “It’s never just about the album and the sales figures, it’s about the company and the people who work on the project - if they are happy and satisfied, I’m happy and satisfied”.

### Get Real Friends!

It’s clear Stefanie adores her friends from the way her face lights up upon their mention. “My friends from secondary school keep me grounded and real. They constantly remind me that I can’t sing!” she laughs. Indeed, Stefanie is mindful of the “Rockstar Syndrome” which sees celebrities being surrounded by people who agree with them all the time. But as Stefanie gamely volunteers, “It never happens to me. In fact, contrary to agreeing with me, they often speak their mind openly!”

Like it or not, Stefanie is likeable. In fact, too likeable.

She gamely signed autographs, posters and promotional CDs. My hour-long interview with her flew by and I felt like I was chatting with a dear friend from NTU where Stefanie was from. There was no tossing of famous names, brands and hoity-toity jargon. Asia’s Pop Princess travels Economy on her shopping trips to Bangkok and Tokyo. “My friends travel economy,” she quips. “So it’s either I fly economy with them or I’ve to upgrade all of them ... and I’m not so generous!” she laughs self-deprecatingly.

### Be Bold but Balanced

Singapore’s most famous export next to Tiger Balm has a bold but firm hold on her life. Many detractors were worried for Stefanie when she announced her one-year break. Will “The Phenomenon” fade? Will the Sun rise again?

Stefanie remained firm in her decision. “It was something I had to do. It was accumulative stress and I was close to breaking point from the hectic schedule and lack of rest. And to add to that, I have digestive problems” – and her stomach rumbles, as if on cue. Her bold decision paid off. Her fans far from forgot her. In fact, Stefanie reportedly still made a hefty NT\$170 million (S\$8.6 million) during her break.

During this sabbatical, Stefanie found time to do volunteer work for Mercy Relief. “While we always know

Calcutta is poor, you’re never really prepared for it until you see it for yourself.”

Stefanie gamely recalls her encounters with the poverty, the conditions in the slums and the hunger of the people. Yet what I was taken with was her balanced meditations on her experience.

Unlike many celebrities who would dramatically declare their travels to Calcutta a mind-blowing, life changing experience resulting in drastic actions like shaving their heads, turning completely vegetarian or giving up their comfortable lifestyle to work in the slums, Stefanie remains grounded. She admits that the experience has moved her intensely, making her deeply appreciative of all that she has been blessed and realising that her stress at work sometimes pales in comparison to the larger ails of the world. “It puts your world in perspective”, she reflects, “and you don’t fret about all the small things anymore”.

### Embrace the Future

Rested and rejuvenated, Stefanie looks set for another blazing year ahead. CHOICES decides to find out her plans for the

immediate 2005 and distant 2046.

“What are my resolutions for 2005?” – she mused. “No resolutions yet, but I hope to complete another album by year end, hold a World Tour and act!” It’s clear she is a fan of comedian Stephen Chow’s works. “I admire his work as he takes people’s laughter, happiness and enjoyment as serious business. I think making people happy is great.”

She looks game for any good script and it’s rumoured that Andy Lau is keen on having her as his co-star. Stefanie is set to go if the right opportunity comes by. “Any role is good, just don’t have me play myself again. I don’t want to play the piano and sing in real life too!” she grins.

And what will she be doing in 2046? The film buff sprightly announces, “I would be somebody relying on botox!”

With that emphatic remark, we are assured that this bright Sun will never set.



Stefanie

孫燕姿