

Creativity in full flow alongside the nine-to-five

Chloe Loung

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A new Cantonese musical written by Lora Chow Hiu-ching, a Yale University-trained soprano and composer, is one of the highlights of the coming Fringe Festival in Hong Kong.

Called *Dr Clown*, it is the tale of a doctor who is so convinced that patients need emotional and psychological support alongside clinical care that he decides that his new calling is to become a hospital clown. Meanwhile, his nephew, a first-year medical student, secretly dreams of being a filmmaker.

Like the titular character, Chow has followed an unconventional career path to fulfil her passion and commitment to bringing joy to people through art.

She started playing the piano at the age of four and has picked up the violin, trumpet, harp and organ over the years, travelling to perform with choirs and orchestras abroad as part of her schooling in Hong Kong and the UK. This laid a foundation for an artistic spirit that refused to be confined.

She majored in music and economics at Yale University, and "fell so much in love with opera" through productions with the Yale Baroque Opera Project.

Chow spent summers performing in Germany and Italy, but the itinerant and often lonely reality of a professional musician's life prompted a pivot.

"You pour all your energy into a show and then it ends and



Composer Lora Chow's *Dr Clown* is one of the highlights of the Fringe Festival. Photo: Jonathan Wong

suddenly you're alone. It felt very heavy and difficult," she says.

She returned to Hong Kong after graduating and took up a stable job in finance. This is the Hong Kong way after all, she says, which sees any student with top marks steered towards traditionally respectable and solid careers.

The same kind of pressure also saw one of her friends from primary school, who once dreamed of being a clown, become a lawyer – the original inspiration for *Dr Clown*.

Unlike the childhood friend,

Chow has refused to stay away from her creative calling. After a period of picking up freelance gigs and occasionally performing in concerts, she started writing her own music. "I always had new music playing in my head. I felt it was a waste not to write it down."

She decided to enrol in the Chigiana film scoring programme in Siena, Italy, where she studied under mentors with experience in Hollywood. It was a "life-changing experience", she says.

Today, she juggles multiple projects on top of her nine-to-five;

she has stayed in finance apart from a brief interlude in 2025, when she took up a role as an associate music director at Shanghai Disneyland, composing and arranging music for park shows and events.

One of Chow's most recent projects is *Sleepless Moon*, a "fusion opera" that blends Cantonese opera with Italian bel canto. The East-meets-West love story is still being developed, but a preview version premiered at Hong Kong's Xiqu Centre in November 2024.

Chow has even found the time to release two solo piano albums of original compositions. The first, *Reveries on Ivories*, came out in 2025. *Pursuits from the Roots*, an 18-track album inspired by nature and inner growth, was released this month. She is also working on the score of a coming Canadian indie film, *The Way You Dance*.

The soundtrack for *Dr Clown* is already available on streaming platforms. It was recorded with the Budapest Scoring orchestra, known for its work on numerous Netflix series and films, and it will accompany the performance at the Fringe Festival, starring local artists Tiffany Lee and Eric Luk.

Chow premiered a shorter version of *Dr Clown* in November as part of the Horizons Festival in Tai Po, shortly after the devastating fire at Wang Fuk Court.

Defending her decision to go ahead when many events were cancelled as a mark of mourning, Chow said it was at such tragic moments that the true purpose of art became clearer than ever.

"Music has a unique power to cut through the darkness, to connect people and to remind us of our shared humanity. It is in our most challenging moments that we need it the most," she says.

"Some family members of the victims told me the music brought them peace. That touched me. And so, the show must go on."

Dr Clown, Fringe Festival 2026, Jockey Club Studio Theatre, Fringe Club, 2 Lower Albert Rd, Central, January 27, 28 and 30, 8pm. The festival runs until February 15 and features over 300 artists who applied through an open call.