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THE SECOND ACT

Local TV stars such as Zheng Geping (pictured) and Xiang Yun have to look over their shoulders, as their children storm into the industry to join them. [Gwendolyn Ng](#) reports. D2&3

Zheng Geping's son Calvert, 17, and daughter Tay Ying, 21, are signed to agency Starlist.

Celebrity offspring

Children of local actors and actresses have found their way into show business



Gwendolyn Ng

Local celebrities' offspring are making a splash in the entertainment scene here, starring in Channel 8 dramas and commercials, and getting signed to talent agencies.

The second-generation stars are Chantalle Ng, actress Lin Meijiao's daughter; Shalynn Tsai, former actress-host Chen Xihuan's daughter; Joel Choo, actor Zhu Houren's son; and Marcus Guo, host Guo Liang's son.

Some of them even come in twos. There are siblings Chen Yixin and Chen Yixi; former actor Edmund Chen and actress Xiang Yun's children; and Tay Ying and Calvert Tay, actor Zheng Geping and actress Hong Huifang's children.

When The Straits Times checked in with a number of the offspring last year, many were undecided about following in their parents' footsteps. Shy teen Chen Yixin even recoiled from the memory of making a cameo in her father's short film *Echoing Love* (2011).

Now they are getting their feet wet and have found their way into show business.

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Grooming the next generation of stars



ADDY LEE, 46, CELEBRITY HAIR STYLIST AND TALENT AGENCY OWNER

Lee (left) not only tends to the manes of local actors and actresses, but he is also grooming their children for stardom.

His talent agency, Starlist, has cornered the market on second-generation stars, signing five of them: Chantalle Ng, Lin Meijiao's daughter; Shalynn Tsai, Chen Xihuan's daughter; Chen Yixin, Edmund Chen and Xiang Yun's daughter; and Tay Ying and Calvert Tay, Zheng Geping and Hong Huifang's daughter and son.

He says: "This batch of celebrities' kids are good-looking and talented. They can sing, dance, play the violin. They are all good kids too. If they can juggle their studies and withstand the pressure, why not gain some experience in show business?"

He first signed undergraduate Chantalle, 21, in December last year.

Lee, who owns a chain of hair salons, says: "My salon director pointed out to me that Chantalle was getting prettier. I didn't really notice because I watched her grow up, as Meijiao would bring her to the salon. I haven't seen her in a while. Then when I next saw her, I realised she got prettier."

Sensing an opportunity with the local celebrities' offspring, he went on to sign the other four.

To prepare the rookies for the limelight, he has been grooming their appearance and sent Calvert, Shalynn and Chantalle to Shanghai for training last year. The trio were joined by host Guo Liang's son, Marcus, on the trip.

Lee says: "I tell them to be mindful of their behaviour and dressing. I used to nag at Chantalle, who used to wear slippers out. Now she is not allowed to do so. "In Shanghai, they took classes in modelling, dancing and fitness."

Their one-month stint was filmed and turned into a Web series on the YouTube channel Three X Media Production, which is run by Lee and hosts Vivian Lai and Quan Yi Fong.

"They just had to be themselves and be natural. I did not want it to look scripted," says Lee. "In China, they also went around meeting producers and other people in the industry. Someone commented that Calvert looks like South Korean actor Lee Min Ho."

Yennying into the China market is a possibility in the future but, for now, the newbies are starting out on home ground, namely Mediacorp Channel 8.

Viewers would have seen them dancing on last month's *Thong Chai Charity Night 2017* show, and Calvert, Shalynn and Chantalle also sang their Mandarin single *Halo* in an episode of *The Sieng Sieng Show* last month.

They will be starring in the upcoming Channel 8 drama *While We Are Young*, about students navigating teenage life. The young cast includes Calvert, Shalynn, Chantalle, Marcus and Yixin, who will star opposite established actresses Zoe Tay and Rebecca Lim.

Lee says: "I visited the film set, but I did not interfere because I did not want to give them pressure. I left them in the good hands of the director and experienced actors. Ah Jie (Zoo) gave them plenty of guidance."

• While *We Are Young* premieres on Channel 8 on Nov 6 at 9pm. It airs on weekdays.



Chen Yixi stars in Dick Lee's biopic movie *Wonder Boy* (2017) while his sister, Chen Yixin, filmed upcoming Channel 8 drama *While We Are Young*. ST PHOTO.

ALPHONSIUS CHERN

Parents were shocked by their acting ambitions

Actor Chen Yixi, 25, and his sister Chen Yixin, 17, Singapore Polytechnic student; children of actress Xiang Yun, 54, and former actor Edmund Chen, 55, who runs event production company Asiatainment

What a difference a year can make. Yixin was a camera-shy introvert when The Straits Times interviewed her last year. A change of environment has helped her blossom into a confident lass ready to take on acting.

She says: "I chanced upon my polytechnic course and everyone in my current class is free-spirited and carefree. In my secondary school, I used to get teased. I always had this feeling that everyone was watching me. But once I went to poly, my per-

spective broadened. So I was like, 'Hey, why not give acting a shot?'"

The Starlist agency talent filmed upcoming Channel 8 drama *While We Are Young* while she was in the first year of her studies in applied drama and psychology.

Her elder brother, Yixi, says cheekily at this interview: "I'm so proud of her." On a more serious note, he adds: "Our parents were shocked that we wanted to enter show business. But they are supportive of us."

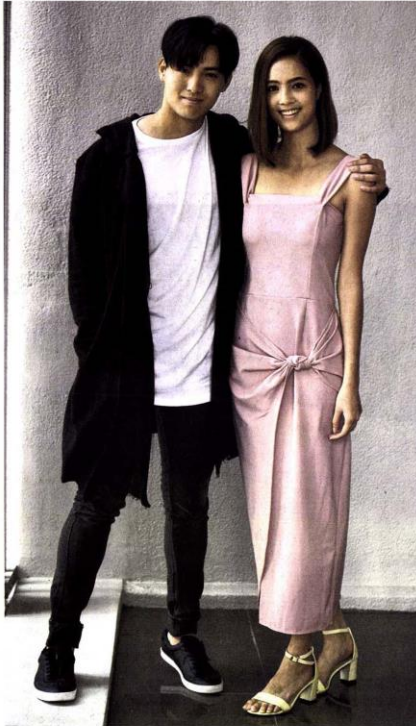
Although he signed with Mediacorp in October last year, he quit his job as a computer graphics artist at a gaming company only a few months ago to go into full-time acting. In between filming Dick Lee's biopic movie *Wonder Boy* (2017), he was still going to

work at the gaming company. "I was juggling both and either one was going to suffer. A lot of people have asked me why I would want to give up a stable job. It was my personal goal to tackle my fear of acting. I was always shy and sensitive to comments," he says.

Negative comments on nepotism continue to plague the siblings, but they take it in their stride.

Yixi says: "People say we got into the industry because of our parents. Some people dislike us because they have to work so hard to go for auditions and may not get the role. We get it, we can empathise. We can't do anything except to work harder."

For his sprightly sister, she simply says and sings: "Cue Taylor Swift: shake it off, shake it off, shake it off."



Calvert Tay will appear in the Channel 8 series *While We Are Young*, while his sister Tay Ying will be starring in upcoming Channel 5 drama *Missing*. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SONG

Tay siblings say no to nine-to-five jobs

Tay Ying, 21, and Calvert Tay, 17, both are pursuing acting careers; children of actors Hong Huifang, 57, and Zheng Geping, 53

The Tay siblings are dead sure that nine-to-five jobs are not for them. So they have decided to pursue acting, like their parents.

Ying says: "The only routine I will follow is my skincare routine. I did a six-month internship at a corporate events company, it was an office job. My bosses and colleagues were very nice to me, but I found the routine very mundane."

Her younger brother concurs: "I haven't tried a nine-to-five job, but I know it isn't for me. Office work would be like going back to school and doing something that I don't like."

"An actor's life is full of ups and downs, and they often work overtime and on weekends. But I feel it is

a lifestyle that I am willing to accept."

Ying is taking a gap year after graduating a few months ago with a diploma in hospitality and tourism management from Temasek Polytechnic. She will be starring in upcoming Channel 5 drama *Missing*.

Calvert completed his O levels last year and has a part in Channel 8 series *While We Are Young*.

Both are signed to celebrity hairstylist and family friend Addy Lee's talent agency Starlist.

They feel that industry folks and the public have greater expectations of them because they are the children of actors.

Ying says: "I'm very scared to NG (have no-good take). If you NG, people may think you did not do your homework and didn't memorise your lines properly. If I work with people who have worked with my

parents, they may compare and wonder why their daughter NG so many times while their father is so professional. People will say things and it gets to me. All I can do is to work extra hard."

Calvert acknowledges that celebrities' children such as themselves do get a leg up in the industry, but only at the start.

He says: "We get a lot of negative comments, such as the only reason why we are able to step into the media industry is because of our parents' connections."

"True, we got a head start but, in the end, it is all up to our hard work. If we do something wrong or don't perform well in acting, you've got to understand that we are still newcomers. We need time to find ourselves in this world and work on our acting craft."



Chantalle Ng has appeared in the SunSik shampoo advertisement plastered on buses. ST PHOTO: KUA CHEE SONG

Don't call her 'Meijiao's daughter'

Chantalle Ng, 21, Singapore Management University student; daughter of actress Lin Meijiao and former actor Huang Yiliang, who divorced in 1997

Growing up, undergraduate Chantalle was used to people approaching her mother for photographs or autographs. These days, the newbie actress enjoys the same star treatment.

She says: "In the past, I was the one taking the pictures for them. Now people recognise me and ask me for my autograph. I don't even have an autograph. I was thinking maybe I should come up with one."

"I'm touched when people call me by my name. If they call me 'Meijiao's daughter', it is like I'm living in her shadow. I hope that I will come to a point where people will not remember me as my mum's daughter."

People may remember her as the girl in the SunSik shampoo advertisement plastered on buses, or from the publicity for upcoming Channel 8 drama *While We Are Young*, which chronicles the lives of students after graduating from secondary school students.

The crew and actors on the film set are also familiar with her. She says: "Since I was in kindergarten, I have been following my mum to the set. The crew and cast watched me grow up on set."

Veteran star Zoe Tay, whom she calls "Auntie Zoe" and stars in *While We Are Young*, guided her and other rookie actors. She says: "I was taken aback by her kindness, she is so humble on set. She takes the time and effort to teach me. She is so patient, she will teach me over and over again."

Her mother, too, has been supportive. Chantalle says: "She has always been supportive of whatever ambitions I had. I wanted to be a vet, she was ready to send me abroad to get a degree. When I wanted to go into media, she said 'Okay, go on!'"

At the moment, she is juggling her studies in information systems with acting.



Despite being Guo Liang's son, Marcus Guo had to audition for upcoming drama *While We Are Young*. PHOTO: GWENDOLYN NG

He wants to be a lawyer

Marcus Guo, 18, Anderson Junior College student; son of actor-host Guo Liang, 48

TV host Guo Liang and his son Marcus like to talk and are good at it. But it is unlikely that the teenager will follow his father's footsteps into show business.

"I tend to be low-key. Sometimes when we go out, people recognise him, I value my privacy," he tells *The Straits Times* in English.

Instead of pursuing a career in front of the camera, he hopes to become a lawyer in future.

"While I was reading up about several careers to get a rough gauge of where I want my life to be, I felt that being a lawyer might be something I am interested in. I'm someone who likes to talk, find holes in another person's argument - that seems something right up my alley. I'm a fairly logical person," says Marcus, who had to be persuaded to do this interview.

He says: "I decided to take on *While We Are Young* since I had free time and my friends were doing it too. My dad was open to me acting and challenging myself. I just had to assure my mum that it would not get in the way of my studies."

Never mind his famous dad, he still had to audition for the role of an optimistic, athletic student.

As the only child of Channel 8's leading television host who came from China, he has to live with greater expectations of his Mandarin-speaking abilities.

Marcus says: "The casting director told me that my Chinese wasn't as good as she had expected. I get it a lot from people. I can do conversational Mandarin, but I don't have precise Mandarin pronunciation."

"I still slip up a little bit, I sound Singaporean. After all, I did grow up here."

Aspiring doctor

Shalynn Tsai, 17, Raffles Institution student; daughter of former actress Chen Xihuan, 50

Shalynn Tsai sometimes gets asked how smooth her hair is when she is in school. It is a gentle dig at the shampoo commercial she stars in.

"Everyone in school knows about my commercial, they are quite chill about it," she says.

The tanned beauty got the advertisement deal after signing on to "Uncle Addy's" Starlist, a talent agency run by celebrity hairstylist Addy Lee, in January.

Before that, she had a bit role in a short film helmed by director Jack Neo for the SGO film project *7 Letters* (2015) and starred in a Web reality series *Adventures In Shanghai*, filmed last December in China.

Her latest project is the upcoming Channel 8 drama *While We Are Young*, which was filmed during the school holidays in June.

She could easily channel the pressures she faced in school into her role of a stressed-out student. "I had common tests after the June holidays. So when I was acting, I subconsciously told myself that my tests were coming," says Shalynn, who is the second of three sisters.

"My mum told me to just relax and see myself as the character and not as someone playing the character."

Shalynn also plays the violin and



Shalynn Tsai plays the violin and hopes to hold a solo concert as well as release a pop classical album. PHOTO: GIN TAY FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

hopes to hold a solo concert in future, as well as release a pop-classical album as a entertainer Vanessa-Mae.

Her mother initially had concerns about daughter getting into show business, she says.

"My mum invested a lot in my studies, sending me for tuition. She was scared that I had crazy dreams to become a celebrity. I had to convince her that my studies came first."

"I don't see it as a career, it is something I will do in my free time. I'm quite the introvert, I'm more of a listener among my friends. The exposure will help me improve my people skills."

Instead, she aspires to be a doctor, like her older sister, who is a medical student. "I want to do medicine. I feel like I'm taking so much from the world and I want to give back."



Joel Choo stars in upcoming Channel 8 drama series *A Million Dollar Dream*, which airs next year. ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

Working hard to prove himself

Joel Choo, 23, actor and musician; younger son of actor Zhu Houren, 62

When rookie actor Joel Choo was working on the upcoming Channel 8 drama series *A Million Dollar Dream*, he returned home one day to find that his father, actor Zhu Houren, had dog-eared some pages of his script.

"I found the pages folded and realised those were not pages with his scenes, but mine. He had helped me mark the pages," says Joel, who signed with Mediacorp in August after completing national service in the same month.

Father and son are starring in the same series for the first time, but they will not be seen in the same scenes. *A Million Dollar Dream* will air next year.

"Maybe in future we can star opposite each other, but not as father and son. That would be just like everyday life. Perhaps we can play enemies," says Joel, who in the drama plays a happy-go-lucky polytechnic student.

His interest in acting was sparked after appearing as a national swimmer in Channel 5 drama *Faculty* (2017).

Tackling a Mandarin-speaking role is a challenge for him, as he says many youngsters like him are more conversant in English.

He has been taking Chinese language lessons with a teacher who goes through with him his script and the enunciation of words. At home, his father practises his lines with him.

Coming across as down-to-earth, Joel is well aware that the label of "second-generation star" has given him a head start in show business.

He says: "If it wasn't for my dad, I would never have had a chance to step into this industry. Sometimes I think that people judge me for it and it doesn't feel good. The only thing I can do is to work hard and prove that I am worthy, I have the substance."