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Backtalk

Remixing her life

Red-hot and super-hyphenated — half-Thai, half-Chinese, Singapore-born violinist Vanessa Mae tells Asiaweek's Jeremy Hansen about maturing, making choices and finding a personal identity



Wei Leng Tay for Asiaweek.

You're only 22, but it seems as if you've been around forever. Don't you feel old?

I felt so old when I was 16, but I feel young now. At 16 I thought about age a lot, but at 22 you grow into who you are. Now I

don't really think about it. I'm really not worried about running out of time. I think we relax as we get older.

You're writing an autobiography. Why now?

I was 18 when I first got asked, but that was really too young. It's only supposed to be about the first part of my life anyway. But in the past two years, so much has happened.

Like you sacked your mother as your manager. Was she living up to the pushy Chinese mother stereotype too much?

That Chinese saying of mother knows best, you realize it's not the truth when you are older. My mother is very competitive, very ambitious. That's great, because she instilled that in me. But now I have my own ambitions. We still talk.

Do you look back on your teenage years like Michael Jackson and think, "What happened to my childhood?"

My teenage years were very work focused. I didn't see my friends socially from the ages of 15 to 20. There wasn't time in my schedule. I didn't realize my life was different from others until I compared myself with people my own age later on.

You were born in Singapore, your father's Thai, you live in London and studied briefly in Beijing. Where's home?

London, because I've lived there since I was four. But in a year like this when I'm on the road, I'll probably only be there for four months. I have two half-brothers in Thailand, but I've only met them a few times. They are so sweet but we can't talk much because they don't really talk English and I don't talk Thai.

You played in Hong Kong during the handover. How do you feel about what's happened here since?

I've only been back twice since then, so I couldn't say. But the artistic feel was exciting. It was a special time, as someone who has a part of both cultures, who doesn't know that much about the Far East because I haven't lived here, but being proud of being Asian and Oriental.

Write to Asiaweek at mail@web.asiaweek.com

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