

# Western Popular Music

Western culture penetrated into Hong Kong's everyday life in the 1950s. As the most popular of popular cultures, films led the way. Music was to be the most enduring transmitter.

At a time when the local market for music records was still developing, radio was the main source of introduction to Western pop. Radio program showhosts like Aileen Woods at Radio Hong Kong English Channel helped to expose an unsuspecting local audience to an ever-widening spectrum of Western pop music. Aileen Woods passed the torch to Uncle Ray in the late 1950s. The latter opened the eyes and ears of a whole generation of music lovers, including Wong Jum-sum, by filling the airwaves with an unfamiliar mix of jazz, rock and pop music. Wong regularly attended the live presentation of *Rumpus Time*, a radio program on Rediffusion hosted by Uncle Ray. He learnt to embrace Elvis Presley and Benny Goodman, rock and jazz, folk and Latin at one go. The plethora of choices in style and genre were simply baffling.

Wong was convinced Western pop was superior to Mandarin or Cantonese pop in every aspect of music making, from composition, lyric writing, singing, instrumentation to production. Many of these music outputs were approachable yet outstanding. They went to the heart of the younger generation.

The ever-attractive Western films had a big hand in exposing him to more Western pop music. There were other influences. Filipino musicians, who Wong Jum-sum befriended in his many sojourns into the recording studios, were another gateway into Western pop.

Very soon, Wong and his generation of music lovers graduated from listening to playing and singing, embracing fully the new sound of Western pop. Wong learnt to play the drums and was hooked on the art of improvisation. He competed in the first Sing Tao Amateur Singing Contest in 1960. He lost that contest, but won a musical sensibility that would never leave him.