

Wanting Qu

Creating Harmony in Music & Life

Written by Carole Audet



Photo by Albert Law

Wanting Qu is a singer-songwriter living in Vancouver since 2000 when she originally came to Canada to study economics at Simon Fraser University. She completed her education, but her heart has always been in music. With creativity, ingenuity, and determination, she pursued her passion and has become a worldwide success.

Her song "Star in You" was featured in an episode of *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, two songs were featured in a Chinese blockbuster, and another song was used in the promo for *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*.

Being in nature is Wanting's happy place—what keeps her grounded—and it's the primary reason she loves living in Vancouver.

What's remarkable about Wanting's musical career is that, with the exception of basic piano lessons between the ages of six and nine, which she's grateful for, she is self-trained. She plays by ear.

In 2005, after having been in Vancouver for five years, she took a semester off of school. "I was miserable during that time because I did not like going to school, I didn't find school liberating or fun. I was withering away because it's not something I'm interested in. It's not something I love to do. I love interacting with people. I love stories, and I love music. I love expressing."

But, as she explains is typical in Asian culture, her Chinese family was insistent she get a degree so she could have a stable job in the future. But she felt different, without knowing exactly how.

While her parents reminded her of the success of their neighbour's or colleague's child, she began to ask herself what was wrong with her. She eventually finished her degree to please her family, but before she did, she dropped her classes for five months and started doing difficult work to make ends meet—because she didn't want to spend her tuition money.

During the five-month hiatus from SFU, she started playing the piano and writing. While she normally wrote her thoughts in a blog, she began to play chords with her words and realized she was writing songs. "I was not trained to write songs, to become a songwriter. I needed an outlet to express my thoughts, express my feelings. It's kind of therapeutic. It's cathartic."

She eventually started playing in public. "It was a grind. I did a lot of hard work before I got to where I am. I hustled a lot in Vancouver. I played a lot of open mics and cafés. I'd drag all my gear by myself—my keyboard, chair, guitar, guitar stand, keyboard stand, my journal where I asked fans to write their thoughts."

She also brought paper hearts and she would suggest to those who wrote in her journal to "take a piece of my heart," along with asking them to tell their friends and bring them along next time if they liked her music.

Over the next four years, Wanting got a band together and started playing open mics with the band while continuing to write songs. But the band only lasted two years given that the members had regular day jobs, businesses to run,

or were training for a different career. "It was just me wanting to make this a career. I appreciated that time with them. I got to realize that if I wanted to be successful in North America in the music industry, I would have to learn the language—how to talk to musicians—because I didn't know how to say C major or C minor or tempo or pitch or frequency in English, because I learned all of that in Chinese. I had to go to school here once I realized I wanted to do this for life."

Wanting attended the Art Institute of Vancouver for a year, where she learned the ins and outs of the music industry. From that point forward, her confidence grew as she became skilled in communicating with others



in the industry who could help her move her career forward.

With this newfound confidence, in 2009 she reached out to a producer to make demos of all the songs she had written up to that point. Once her hard work was in digital form, she then proceeded to reach out to the CEO of a local label, Terry McBride of Nettwerk Music Group. "I searched his name on Facebook and it popped up, and I sent him a message," she recalls.

Wanting points out that Facebook was fairly new in 2009, so McBride did read her message that explained how she writes music from her heart, and that included a link to her music. He liked what he heard and asked her to send more to his office. They eventually met in person, and he asked her about her dream, what exactly she wanted for her music career. He also asked her if she would "be interested in doing an east meets west kind of thing." That was indeed part of her dream.

McBride saw the potential in Wanting's Chinese songs, despite not

understanding the lyrics. McBride's team reached out to Universal Music China who also liked Wanting's music. Contracts were signed, communication happened between Canada and Universal Music China, and work began in 2010. By 2012, before her first full-length CD was released and solely through her own hustle, Wanting's video had hundreds of thousands of views in China. As she says, labels want to see artists who have "their stuff together" and she certainly does.

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It's a blessing to have that to experience, to know something I created helped someone continue on and not give up. I want people to feel, through my experience, that they can also see themselves overcome life challenges.”

"In 2012, I became the number one singer-songwriter of the year, had a number one song, best album of the year, and best new artist in Asia."

In fact, Wanting won eight awards that year:

Global Chinese Music Awards: Best Newcomer, Outstanding Regional Artist Award (Beijing), Best Song for "You Exist in My Song"

Chinese Music Awards: Best New Artist, Best New Original Artist, Best Music Composer, Best Song again for "You Exist in My Song"

Music Times Awards: Best Album of the Year for *Everything in the World*.

She's still in awe when she thinks about the screaming crowds she attracts, and the fact people are reacting this way because of something she created. And she's deeply moved by the many messages from fans who tell her how her songs helped them through a dark time. "It's a blessing to have that to experience, to know something I created helped someone continue on and not give up. I want people to

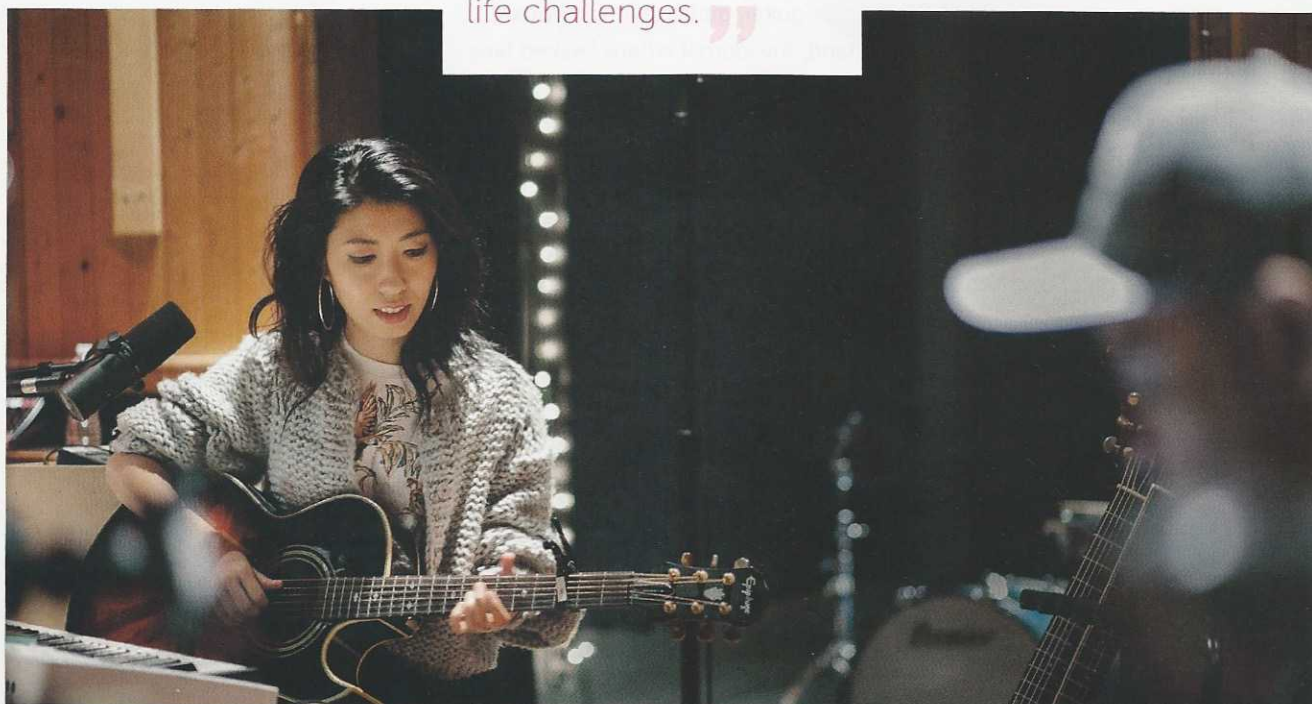


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Wanting's approach to veganism is much like her approach to songwriting: it's about kindness. She partly credits her cat Joey and her mission to save him from FIP (Feline Infectious Peritonitis) with her decision to go vegan. "I think that was the beginning of my veganism. I learned so much about myself through that experience. I learned I had so much love to give. I have so much patience and so much strength in me to heal a wounded being. It's a great feeling to save a life," shares Wanting.



When not creating new music, Wanting is caretaker to Joey, a FIP cat with his own Instagram page [@joeylovestheworld](#), which she set up to help other FIP cat parents. Above is Joey Before and After treatment for FIP. The photo on the right shows Joey in excellent health.

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In 2014, Wanting did an eighteen-city North American tour. She packed shows in all locations, including the House of Blues in Chicago, despite many venues not being familiar with her music. This tour started in Vancouver with a bang when she had a fall that bruised her hip and shoulder and cracked her guitar. But, as she says, she had to keep going.

"It was a fun time, a memorable time. The most memorable moments were when playing on stage I would see Asian faces singing English songs and non-Asian faces singing Chinese songs. I'm not surprised if they can sing my English songs, but when their lips are moving and singing the same words that I'm singing in Chinese, that blew my mind."

When asked who she would most like to collaborate with, Sarah McLachlan is at the top of her list, which makes sense given their similar styles. When she initially reached out to Terry McBride, Sarah McLachlan, who is signed with Nettwerk Music Group, was among the artists Wanting mentioned as proof she knows exactly who he is in the music world.

Song writing for Wanting is a way to heal, to process her feelings, get through a tough time, and to express herself. "When you feel something, and it's internally shaking you, it's helpful to put it into words. It's like going to therapy; you need to talk it out so that it doesn't eat away at you. Writing songs is my way to heal myself."

So, it makes sense that her songwriting inspiration comes from events in her life. "It could be something I experienced firsthand, or that I read in a book, or watched in a movie, or from friends. I wrote a song recently called "Saviour". It was inspired by two images. One was a picture of a pig on a transport truck. He was in the back of the small truck and his nose was sticking out, as if he was smelling the rain. That picture triggered me to write from his perspective. Another picture was of a chicken, also with her head out of the cage on a truck. It's the eyes; once you see them, it's like you see that soul and you just want to do something for them. You can feel what they're feeling, and you can feel their suffering."

Wanting is planning on releasing "Saviour" this year so it can do its work in the world.

While vegan for less than two years, like many of us who make the switch, she wishes she had transitioned sooner. She admits that she was raised in a family where it was thought and taught that one must eat animal protein to be healthy. But watching the movie *The Game Changers* opened her eyes. She followed this up by doing her own research, Googling the doctors mentioned in the documentary, watching YouTube videos and other documentaries, such as *Cowspiracy*

and *Dominion*. But this wasn't her first foray into giving up meat. She had watched the film *Earthlings* ten years before and was horrified by what she saw, finding herself sobbing throughout the documentary and leading her to give up meat.

But this film does not address nutrition, so four months later, when she found herself feeling tired, she fell back into eating meat because she was convinced she needed the animal protein.

The Game Changers documentary addresses nutrition, so that's when the final piece of the puzzle fell into place, and she gave up meat for the last time. "If I had someone in my life before this to share about the nutrition side of veganism, I would have switched [to plant-based] in a heartbeat," she explains.

Her love for all beings shines through as she explains that she wants a peaceful life and doesn't want to cause anyone any pain or their death. She wants to share this message on her mega platform, despite some resistance from fans who follow her for her music and don't necessarily want to hear her cruelty-free vegan message. Other fans, however, are open to her message and go on to learn more about what goes on in



factory farms and eventually give up meat and dairy.

"I lead by example. People see me happy, see me appreciating life. I look good. I'm smiling, I'm dancing, I'm singing. I have this nice energy. Once in a while, I do share information—like videos or facts. I focus on the positive. If one person sees the truth and changes their actions, who knows, maybe they'll influence their family and their community."

After watching *The Game Changers* and realizing she didn't need animal protein to be healthy, Wanting went on to research what was best for her health and to give her the vitality she wanted. She went on to earn a plant-based nutrition certificate through T. Colin Campbell's Center for Nutrition Studies. She now eats a balanced plant-based diet, giving her plenty of energy for her busy life. She even credits this balanced approach to eating for helping her with her moods.

Wanting has made a point to connect with the vegan community, both online and off. She sponsors several animals at Happy Herd Farm Sanctuary and visits regularly to meet volunteers and fellow vegans and animal lovers.

She supports vegan restaurants in Vancouver, but she cooks a lot for herself as well. "I eat clean at home. I eat organic, gluten-free, not a lot of sugar, salt, or fat," explains Wanting.

Her go-to meal consists of sautéed vegetables such as yams, broccoli, carrots, bok choy, garlic, and onions with a bit of miso sauce. She'll pair that with quinoa or cauliflower pasta and top it with a bit of lemon or apple cider vinegar, and soy sauce. Often, she'll put this dish on a bed of spring mix lettuces, with cucumber or tomato and sprinkle the entire dish with nooch, nuts and seeds, or a flaked nori sheet. And, she's a big fan of turmeric

powder and curry.

"In North America, there are not many Asian faces that talk about veganism openly. Maybe they practice in a way that's more spiritual. But I'm speaking up about veganism for animals, for the environment. I hope to inspire other people who look like me or people who haven't thought about or looked at veganism from these angles. I would ask them, 'Did you know that humans can get all the protein needed from plants?' Maybe that would trigger their curiosity and lead to asking questions. And then also showing them I'm vegan."

Wanting goes for blood tests every three months and she's not deficient in any way. Additionally, she notes that the brain fog she used to get is gone, and she has the energy she needs to stay active.

Her advice for anyone who is curious about the vegan way of life is simple.

"If you want more peace in your life, to have more joy and happiness, then simple actions at every meal can create that. Try one day, then see how you feel mentally. Ask questions and open your mind to the possibility that you can live a healthy life without meat.

"We humans are gifted with this brilliant brain, like no other animal, that we can use to help others in the world and not to destroy, not to give in to selfishness, but to kindness and love, to lift other people. That's when human brains are at their most useful and meaningful and beautiful." •

Learn more about Wanting and her music:

 Spotify and  Apple Music

Instagram  @wantingq

YouTube  youtube.com/wantingsmusic

