



A START-UP OF A DIFFERENT SORT

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Bhairavi Jani

When we think of a start-up, an office with workstations or a factory shop-floor or a garage with software programmers is what we visualise. We don't think of an academy full of classrooms with music and singing coming from several directions. But Mountain Music Academy (MMA) is a start-up with a difference. Co-founded in 2010 by Bethel Tsuzu in Dimapur with a handful of students and one teacher, the academy today has three branches, over 300 students and 20 faculty members. MMA offers a full schedule of music lessons in a variety of music disciplines such as the piano, violin, drums, voice, guitar and even a pre-school music program for the little ones called 'the right note'.

In the words of Bethel, the Director of MMA, 'If I were not an entrepreneur, I would be a performing musician or a music educator'.

The Pianist

In fact, Bethel's journey had started as a musician. Bethel Tsuzu, a graduate in Church Music from the Singapore Bible College, began learning the piano at the tender age of seven. Growing up in Nagaland, music has been her



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lifelong passion. After completing her Licentiate in Piano under Trinity College, London, Bethel continued

to pursue music as a musician and a performer for many years. She performed with the legendary

violinist Dr L. Subramaniam and Kavita Krishnamurthy in Nigeria, and then for the Singapore symphony orchestra, also for the charity shows of Project L.I.F.E. Bangkok and with the well-known song writer and lyricist, Brent Chambers from New Zealand. The list of her performances and shows is quite exhaustive. A recipient of the Young Musicians Award from NEZCC, Govt. of India, Bethel also won the Edgar Fewkes Memorial Trophy for outstanding Musician, 2011 from the Trinity Music examination, Bangalore.

But apart from being a professional pianist, she is a gifted teacher and has produced many excellent students. Her passion of teaching the piano and the desire to start something of her own led Bethel in the direction of entrepreneurship and the result was Mountain Music Academy.

The Entrepreneur

Heading the school as the director and co-owner, Bethel and her sister Nituo Tsuzu, also a pianist and an accomplished piano tutor, has worked to mould Mountain Music academy into a space for students to train to be professional musicians and not just pursue music as a hobby. They also co-own and run a retail outlet of musical instruments called Furtados Music Store (franchisee of Furtados Music India Pvt. Ltd).

When you ask Bethel what made her decide to be an entrepreneur and start her own business? She responds: 'Three strong reasons actually, 1) the realization of the need for a store with good musical instruments and music related supplies, 2) the lack of a quality music school in Dimapur, and 3) my desire to be financially independent and successful'.

Like most start-ups, Bethel and her sister started with personal funds, a bank loan, and franchisee credit modules to get going in the initial years. The lack of professional business knowledge, standard operating processes and funds have been her biggest challenges, which are not so different from many start-ups in varied industries across the country. Having scaled-up despite those initial obstacles, she says that even today hiring quality professionals as part of her team continues to be a major challenge.

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She has been wise in accepting that she may not know everything about running a business and enrolled for the IEF Entrepreneurship Foundation's masterclasses when they were offered in Nagaland a year ago. Despite a busy working day of 10 to 12 hours, Bethel took the initiative to learn and enhance her own skills. In her own words, 'Being an IEF Fellow has been very encouraging and has driven her to do better and think wiser. Every time I come back from an IEF masterclass, I am refreshed and my team says oh so now we will be grilled for many weeks and given many new things to do'.

Her advice to those dreaming of a venture of their own is simple, 'Look out for financial mismanagement, leadership failures and invest in self-learning. I wish I had something like IEF earlier because it has taught me how to think and has made me more professional in running my venture'.

Looking Ahead

Apart from constant activities like concerts, performance labs, recitals, live jams, workshops, masterclasses and Sunday performance projects, MMA is also the centre for international music exams, such as Trinity Guildhall London, and Rockschooll London. The school also started the first ever music talk show called *Le connect -inside the mind of an artist*, and a series of studio sessions that will have musicians interacting and learning from professionals from the field of music.

Bethel simultaneously juggles between workshops and performances and plans to keep herself busy with more concerts and shows, experimenting with Naga folk tunes and instruments, and music from the rest of the globe as well.

The school looks forward to a fully-fledged performing arts academy, where students can come and find their calling in music. As Bethel passionately points out, 'I hope that our students and teachers will not be mere consumers of music and any other form of art, but with all that we learn in this school, we will learn to recreate, reproduce and contribute to society and the world at large'.

The writer is Chairperson, IEF Entrepreneurship Foundation