

Media Release

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Talking about difficult topics and pressing issues with personal stories in a new podcast series by former NMP and social advocate Anthea Ong



SINGAPORE, 6 August 2021 - Wanting to invite more Singaporeans to talk with, and not talk past each other on difficult and divisive issues was what inspired former NMP Anthea Ong to start a new podcast series.

Called 'Shades of Love', based on her eponymous book 50 Shades of Love, she brings her own lived experience from a chapter of the book to each episode and invites a guest to share their personal stories on pressing issues of our times.

"I think there is nothing more powerful than for us to bring ourselves into the change that we are advocating for. Always valid, our personal experience also informs the person(s) we are talking to that there is a human dimension that must be taken care of in the discussion - that this is not just another intellectual talkfest", said Ms Ong who is also a social entrepreneur including founding Hush TeaBar and A Good Space.

Elaborating further, Ong added that as Singapore matures as a democracy and society, we have to increasingly confront difficult and sensitive topics as a people - whether it be racial relations, poverty, suicides, gender equality, sexual orientation and the majority/minority divide in so many issues. However, "the medium of social media where we have these conversations is less than ideal. We seem to talk past each other, and don't listen to *listen* but instead listen to respond, sometimes even to impress".

As a social advocate, Ong hopes the weekly podcast series can contribute in a small way towards more Singaporeans asking: How can we connect with each other more authentically on these issues so we seek to understand? How can we challenge the dominant narrative without being judged as being sensitive or a troublemaker?

Agreeing with Ong, the podcast guest for episode two Dr. Rayner Tan, a public health researcher thinks the public podcast platform is also strangely a 'safe space' because Ong shares her own vulnerabilities in each episode so honestly.

"These conversations allow us to explore multiple experiences and perspectives because no one lives a single-issue life. It felt like Anthea and I were just having a cup of tea and as we discussed issues like imposter syndrome, LGBTQ and majority privilege, I shared my own experience across these issues, and so did she about her own struggles with imposter syndrome as a woman. It was natural and honest"

The first season of Shades of Love kicks off with chapter 1 of the book called 'Stop' with gender equality advocate Corinna Lim of Aware who chats about gender and identity. The season wraps with the 12th episode with Paralympian and Ong's fellow former NMP, Yip Pin Xiu discussing social and self acceptance based on the chapter 'Accept'.

In between and across 10 weekly episodes, Ong chats with guests like Rayner Tan, Raeesah Khan, Zulhaqem Zulkifli, Alfian Sa'at, Linda Collins, Susan de Silva, Carrie Gill, Zakir Hossain Khokan, Imran Taib and Stephane de Montilvault on pressing issues of our times such as LGBTQ, parenting, poverty, measures of success, abortion, suicides, major transitions, divorces, migrant experience, race & religion, sustainability and business as a force of good.

Self-funded by Ong and produced in partnership with Crane Radio, the weekly podcast officially launched on 7 August 2021 at social club Crane situated at Kim Yam Road. Specially timed for National Day and calling the launch event a 'Love Tribute to Singapore: This is What Loving Singapore Looks Like', Ong ended the launch with guests reciting an adaptation of the Singapore Pledge:

We, the citizens and residents of Singapore, pledge ourselves as one united people. Regardless of race, language, religion, gender, age, class, ability, sexual orientation or nationality, to build a democratic society based on justice and equality, so as to achieve happiness, prosperity, and progress for our nation.

Asked why she calls it Shades of Love, Ong quoted this paragraph from her book, "love has failed me through different seasons of my life - from being born with an eye defect, being undesirable as a teenager to being cheated on and later sued by my husband. Yet it is also the love that came in so many shades and shapes including the unyielding support of family and friends as well as the generosity of strangers that lifted me each time I fell, and at every flight of my life."

Shades of Love with Anthea Ong will be available on all major podcast channels including Spotify and Apple.

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