



Like this article?
Follow us on Facebook,
Twitter and Instagram.

JUST DANCE, DANCE, DANCE

By **MING PANG**
editor@leaderonomics.com

It is just past 2am in the car park of Chin Woo stadium. We're milled around the Rexton and trying to tetrise in the last of the party detritus so we can finally—please deities—go home.

It was the last party of South East Asia (SEA) Jam 2016, a 5-day swing dance extravaganza that began in Singapore and ended in Kuala Lumpur (KL), and it was about as crazy as it sounds.

It was the largest event I've ever been involved in organising. Every person who takes on a leadership role has those points where the skills and resources you have, and what you're aiming for, is separated by a gaping, yawning abyss.

Possibly full of unknown terrors and monsters that are not of the glitter kind.

SEA Jam 2016 was mine.

IN THE BEGINNING...

Planning began over a year ago when I was approached by my teacher, mentor and Asian swing dance ringleader, Sing Lim. She headed the SEA Jam committee of three in Singapore and floated this idea of the first-ever multi-city event. Would my husband Jordan and I (we run KL Swing in Malaysia) join them in making this a reality?

Being of more practical and pessimist stock, it really concerned me. I talk a big party game, but this was a concern. From a logistical, financial, stressful, emotional point of view, we were clearly over-reaching.

The dangers of taking the leap

LESSONS I LEARNT FROM ORGANISING THE SEA JAM 2016

and falling played large in my mind, as I'm sure is true for anyone sane that is taking on a big challenge. Those doubts are healthy to have and it's not wrong to have them.

But of course fear is one part only of a two-sided coin. Flip it and entertain the opposite possibility—of the amazing times that could be had and the amount of people that we could touch with such a big event. I immediately thought of the food I could serve my foreign friends. And how much fun my last (albeit much smaller) event was three years ago. I imagined the ripples we would make if we managed to pull it off. Then it becomes a dare, almost.

"Betcha can't do it..."
"Oh yeah? Betcha I can."

HOW DID I DO IT?

In this case you're not counting on circumstances turning out just right, or magical unicorns turning up with bags of cash to make it a success. That would truly be gambling.

What you're betting on is yourself and your team: (1) that you'll work together to keep going to look for a solution when problems come up; (2) and that you will see this idea through, in whatever shape or form that turns out to be.

It might be useful now to cover things that didn't turn out in our favour:

•Our very special guest, Chazz



Three swing dancers having a ball at the SEA JAM 2016. From left: James Lee, Hong Wee, and Jordan Saw.

BUT OF COURSE FEAR IS ONE PART ONLY OF A TWO-SIDED COIN. FLIP IT AND ENTERTAIN THE OPPOSITE POSSIBILITY—OF THE AMAZING TIMES THAT COULD BE HAD AND THE AMOUNT OF PEOPLE THAT WE COULD TOUCH WITH SUCH A BIG EVENT.

Young, the son of swing dance master Frankie Manning, didn't make it due to health issues. (He is recovering well now.)

•The devaluation of the ringgit to historical lows meant the pricing of the event (budgeted in Singapore Dollars) went from being an expensive treat to really unfeasible for many local dancers.

•Our initial booking for Chin Woo stadium, which has a huge parquet floor, had to be moved to a smaller function room with laminate flooring because we didn't have the expected people who signed up.

•Gunhild Carling, our bandleader, was going to bring another member of her family band. But we had to cancel that as well.

•Personally, I had health issues and had to take a few months at a slow pace whilst I recovered.

WHAT REALLY WENT DOWN

So here's what did turn out. I'm using estimates here as final numbers aren't in yet:

•120 people participating in Singapore

•Bus trip from Singapore to KL via Malacca had landed a couple

hours late with visa hiccups, but fine in the grand scheme of things

•150 or more people turned up in KL

•Six international teachers, five nights of live music, one Swedish bandleader

•One video of Carling, our Swedish bandleader, and a local Malaysian band WVC that has at time of writing, received half a million views

The process to get here was painful. Countless Monday nights spent on hours-long conference calls, and so many problems with no clear solution because we've simply never been in this position before, all whilst juggling our own complicated lives and situations.

PARTING THOUGHTS

But (get ready for high-minded reference material) as Jerry Seinfeld said in an episode of *Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee*: Pain is information. And we, as a committee, certainly got a lot more informed in this process! There is no doubt we all grew immensely and made connections that we have never imagined possible. And it's now something we can look back with pride that we have made a new path.

I'm immensely grateful to have a mischief-maker like Sing Lim in my life, and with a tight, skilled and supportive team, I'm happy to say the mischief was definitely managed.

■ *Ming Pang is the founder of KL Swing (Malaysian Swing Dance Pioneer).*