

MIND
your
BODY

Helping patients beat their illness

Drumming can help anyone from the disabled to those suffering from Parkinson's disease.

LISABEL TING reports

Former professional musician Louis Francis Albert is a drummer who has performed in 14 countries and spent two years touring with Taiwanese pop star A-Mei.

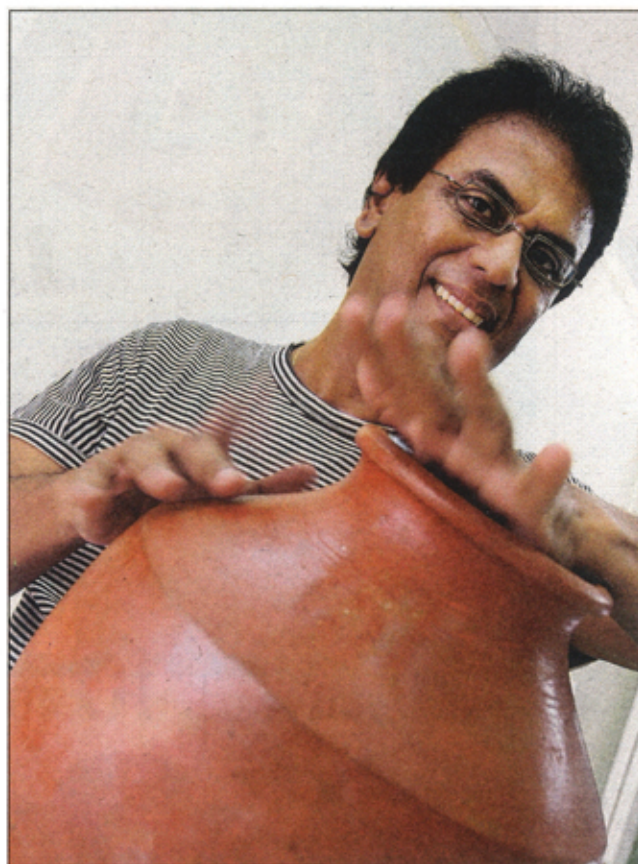
He was used to the limelight. But these days, he uses his skills and drums for a different purpose – to help people who have been disabled by certain diseases.

Mr Albert describes himself as a drum facilitator.

He first became acquainted with the practice in 2002 after watching a visiting Canadian therapist conduct a session at a children's home. He was intrigued by the effects of drumming on a person's physical and emotional well-being, so he decided to teach himself how to use his passion to help others.

He has worked with numerous organisations, such as the Institute of Mental Health, the Singapore Association for Mental Health, the People's Association and the Singapore School for the Deaf.

Though trial and error, he has developed his own set of exercises to improve the overall



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Mr Albert develops his own set of drumming exercises to improve patient's coordination and well-being.

well-being of his patients.

When he first started, Mr Albert observed physiotherapy sessions and noted the movements that patient were instructed to make. He then developed ways of playing the drum that mimic those movements.

In order to improve coordination and muscle tone, he instructs his clients to exaggerate their movements when they play. For example, when playing drums or the gong, he makes them open their hands wide before striking the instruments.

"Hitting the drums also helps to relieve stress and negative feelings," he says. "When people drum, they are generally having fun, and it is difficult to be stressed when you are in a playful mood."

The results of his drumming therapy have been remarkable. He keeps video records of his therapy sessions with an elderly man suffering from Parkinson's disease. After 1½ years of drumming therapy, the man's coordination improved markedly. Although his hands still shook, he could hit a gong the size of a saucer.

Mr M. K. Imran, a physiotherapist at the Apage Senior Citizens Home, attests to this. "Drumming therapy can help in improving a patient's coordination and confidence as well as build up their muscle strength," he says.

At the Singapore School for the Deaf, the results were similar.

"The drumming therapy tremendously improved the children's articulation and intonation," says its principal, Madam Hanisnah Kasmuri.

However, although the response to drumming therapy has generally been positive, Mr Albert says that he still faces difficulties.

"Once, there was this elderly patient who refused to hit the drum when I presented it to him. It took three sessions before I figured out what the problem was – he was unfamiliar with the komping (Malay drum). When I gave him a Chinese drum, he started to play."