



FITNESS TRAINER to the STARS

*How Michael Chan
keeps celebrities in shape*

By Scott Murphy



HIGH PROFILE pop stars like Kylie Minogue and South Korean sensation Rain, not to mention a host of Cantopop entertainers, are no strangers to the Harbour Plaza Hong Kong on the Hung Hom waterfront. But when celebrities visit the hotel's fitness centre for a work-out, trainer Michael Chan doesn't get intimidated. He gets physical.

A full-time fitness trainer and manager for the past three years, Michael is the rarest of breeds: well versed in dietary science and fitness techniques, he is also familiar with the latest music and entertainment trends, courtesy of his time spent with major record companies through much of the 1990s. But sensing a dead end in the industry due to declining record sales, he turned to his next great love, fitness and weight training.

"I was working with Cantopop star Ekin Cheng before a concert," says Michael. "We came here to join the club and work out together. We met the manager and asked if I could train Ekin here. So I did. Word got out and now I know many artistes and celebrities who want me to train them."

With over 100 members and growing, one of the fitness centre's selling points is the breathtaking harbour view that has been described as the best in the city. The club contains all of the latest weight training and cardiovascular equipment



Michael admits that losing a lot of weight in a short time is a serious business

and another bonus is the sense of being in a private oasis, far from the stresses of everyday Hong Kong life. And, in terms of privacy, Michael values his famous clients so much that he is reluctant to divulge names without a bit of friendly arm-twisting. “Hong Kong male artistes like to show a lot of muscle,” he

“I train a maximum of four people a day to maintain the quality,” he says. “The people I train here often become good friends. Some executives will tell me about their tough day. They like to talk to me. It’s more personal. Some people need to be pushed. When I am working with them, I convince them that exercise is good.”

The club is open from 6 am to 10 pm every day but Michael also has other duties in addition to training. He oversees two full-time lifeguards at the hotel’s unique glass pool as well as four other recreational officers. Collectively, they maintain the immaculate state of the fitness centre and try to ensure that customer satisfaction is guaranteed. “I like helping people. If I can help someone, I am already happy,” says the genial trainer.

When it comes to personal training sessions, Michael does his best to educate celebrities and regulars alike about what it takes to become fit. “I tell them to eat breakfast,” he says. “That’s hard for a lot of people. They say ‘I drink coffee in the morning’, but it’s not breakfast.

“They say ‘I can’t eat early in the morning,’ I tell them that eating wheat toast and bread is good. The second thing is to eat well. A diet of just dim sum and kimchi isn’t good – there must be balance. I tell them not to drink beer at night because they can’t get to sleep. And weight training is essential for most people. The average person should train for at least 30 minutes, three times a week.”



says. “So I’ll get people like Leo Ku who came to train before his last concert. Actor Chapman To has trained with me. Producer and radio personality Lawrence Cheng trained here too, until he told me he had no time. One female talk show host even came to me with the idea of getting one of her staff to lose weight. I made him lose 38 lbs (16.3 kg) in six weeks. When I get results, they tell their friends.”

Michael admits that losing a lot of weight in a short time is a serious business and he applies firm rules based on the many years he has spent weight training, dating back to his UK student days when he was bullied for being skinny. Nearly two decades later, he’s not only in great shape but knows how to get his clients in shape too.

On a daily basis, 200 to 300 hotel guests are paying attention to what he says. That includes his high-profile celebrity clients who usually end up becoming members, such is the sophisticated, private nature of the club. But even though Michael has become a trainer to the stars, it seems that he still keeps an ear to the ground when it comes to his roots. The self-proclaimed Pearl Jam, Black Eyed Peas and Justin Timberlake fan doesn’t have many members who love his choice of in-house music though. “So, to please them, I turn it off,” he says with a smile.

One of the fitness centre’s selling points is the breathtaking harbour view.

