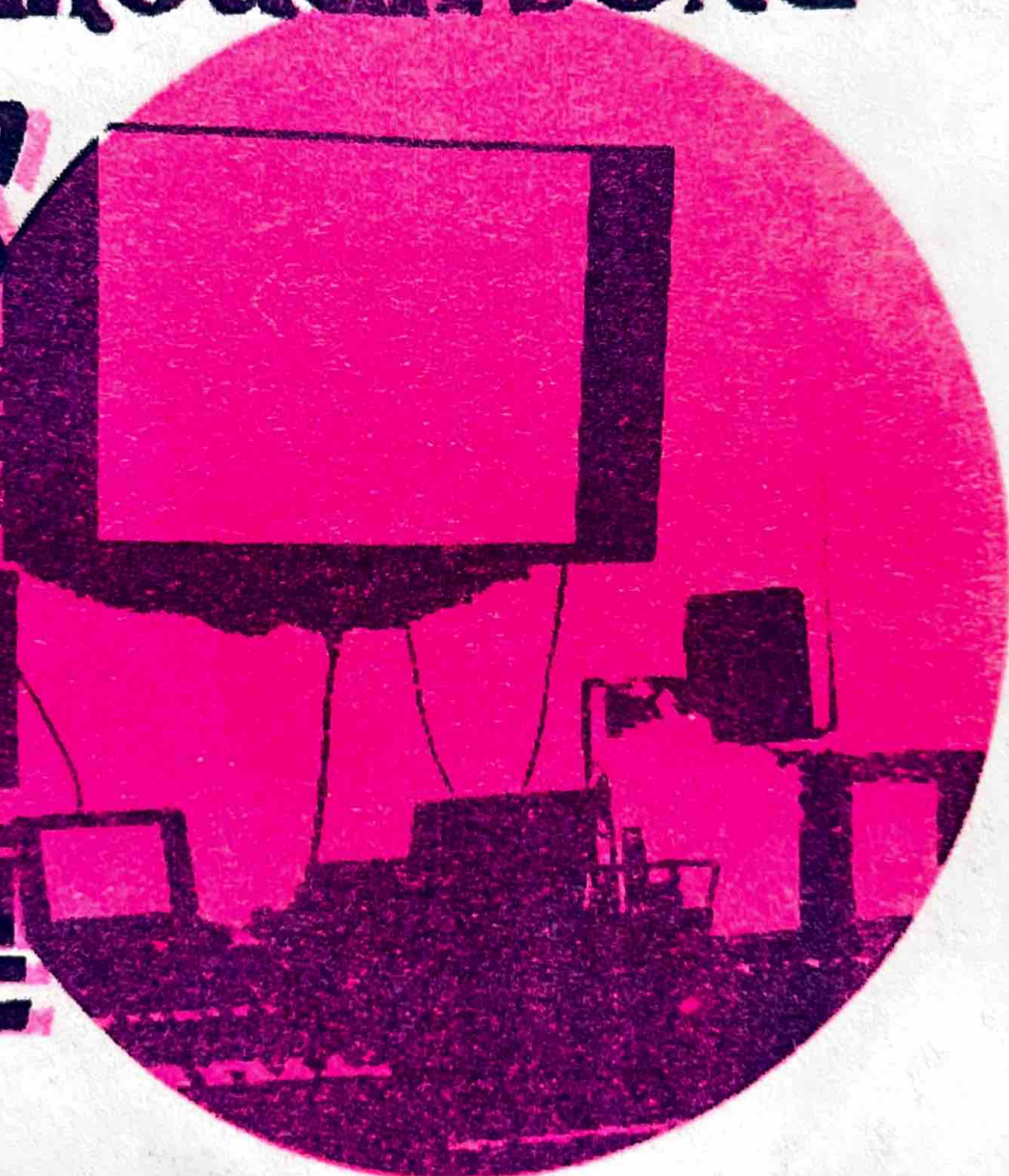


CONNECTING THROUGH SONG

歌聲
相連



A creative health project
for Cantonese diaspora
(2026)

CTS was a pilot creative health* research project that ran from July–August 2026, exploring approaches to community-based music therapy to support the wellbeing of Cantonese diaspora communities living in the UK.

The project ran over eight weeks, with one-hour sessions held each week at the East and South East Asian (ESEA) Community Centre in Dalston, London. Sessions were facilitated by Charlotte Chu, a music therapist from Hong Kong, now living in London.

This zine is a collaboration between the facilitators, volunteers and participants involved in the project. It brings together reflections and creative work from across the sessions, and was compiled by Jess Hui.

In the sessions, we sang around two to three familiar Cantonese and Mandarin songs. While many of the songs were familiar, improvisation and play were an important part of the sessions. We explored these through singing, playing percussion instruments, drawing and creating choreography.

*Creative health is defined by the National Centre for Creative Health as “creative approaches and activities which have benefits for our health and wellbeing” (NCCH, 2024).

Collaborative intentions

The project explored how creative and collaborative approaches might support the wellbeing of ESEA communities, particularly people with connections to Cantonese language and music.

Jess and Charlotte developed four initial intentions for the project, which everyone was invited to contribute to and shape throughout the eight sessions:

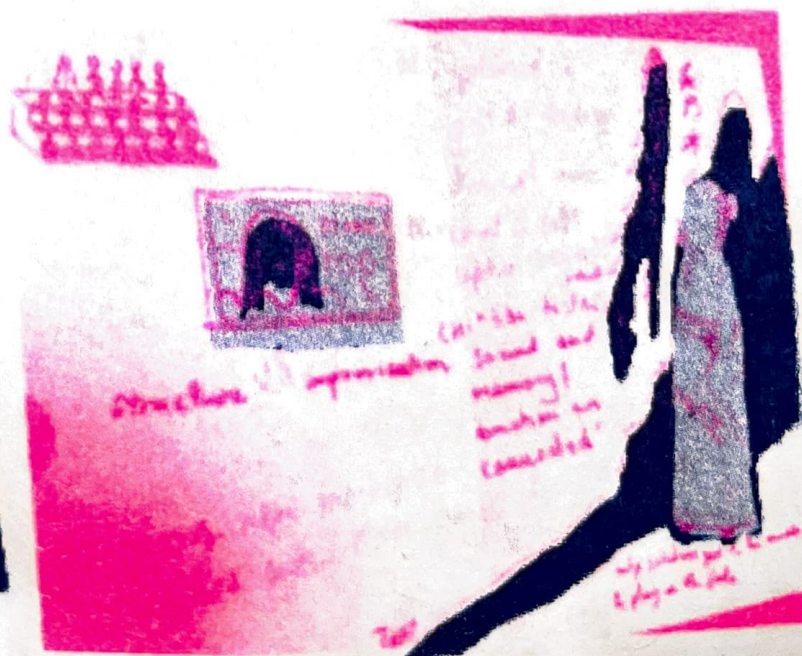
- 1) Voice agency and participation - to support participants voice, choice, and agency within sessions.
- 2) Promote group cohesion - through shared music-making and active participation - in structured and improvised musical activities
- 3) Strengthen connection with cultural identity - to support connection with cultural and linguistic identity through engagement with familiar music
- 4) Belonging and inclusion - to foster a sense of belonging, inclusion and shared experience.

Through singing, playing, movement, drawing and discussion, we reflected on these intentions. The broad themes from these reflections are illustrated on P6.

1967 問我 - Ask Me 陳麗斯 - Lily Chan
1975 乘風破浪 - Ride the Wind and Break the Waves 楊詩蒂 - Yeung Si-tai
1975 月光光 - Moonlight, Moonlight 李寶釐 - Lee Po-ying
1976 半斤八兩 - Half a Catty, Eight Taels 許冠傑 - Sam Hui
1977 月亮代表我的心 - The Moon Represents My Heart 鄧麗君 - Teresa Teng
1980 上海灘 - The Bund 葉麗儀 - Frances Yip
1982 萬水千山總是情 - Love Across a Thousand Mountains and Rivers 汪明荃 - Liza Wang
1983 漫步人生路 - Walk Along the Road of Life 鄧麗君 - Teresa Teng
1986 勁舞 Dancing Queen - Dancing Queen 麥潔文 - Connie Mak
1989 夕陽之歌 - Song of the Setting Sun 梅艷芳 - Anita Mui



Playlist 播放列表



Reflections

Cantonese Language and diaspora

All of us identified as Cantonese-speaking diaspora from different countries, including Scotland, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam, with different relationships to the language and varying familiarity with traditional and simplified script.

"I think people are here because they want to learn and they have different relationships to the (Cantonese) language and music"

"When we went to school or in public (in Kuala Lumpur) everybody spoke Cantonese. It was more spoken than written or read. When I came to the UK to work I didn't speak Cantonese but since coming to the community centres I am speaking more Cantonese again."

Music making, improvisation and play.

"Improvising through dance and the music, it felt like we were connecting with each other"

"To feel safe is to play like a child"

"I sing karaoke at the centre fairly regularly, but I have never made music together like we have in these sessions. I had some singing classes in primary school but music making was not really encouraged in school after that."

"There was a lot of playing and exploring the sounds of different textures in the room and it was funny!"

"This is the first time we jumped off our chairs and then tried to improvise while playing non-musical instruments (water cups and the furniture)"

What does it mean to participate?

"Active participation does not just mean singing or playing along with the drum, but listening and movement can be active participation."

"If people want to be cheeky, funny playful, then (we) go with that. But when people want to just sit back and feel more meditative or just be a bit more passive listening, embrace that"

"[The energy] is based on, like, really trying to closely listen to each other...it is trusting someone will respond"

"Because the space is so open, I would say even people who are technically not part of the sessions are shaping it, because they're changing the environment and feel of the space. You walk in and people will say hi to you and you never leave without food!"

What does creative health
mean to you? How might you
practice healing through
creativity?

What would it look, sound
and feel like to practice
healing with others?

What helps you feel
comfortable to participate
in creative activities and/
or play?

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中文翻譯