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# How fame takes toll on Shy8



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THE problem with being a runaway hit (in any form) is, one would always have to meet people's expectations as well as always coming up with something that could top the previous achievement.

Just ask Hot FM's new on-air presenter Syed Mohamad Asri, or more commercially known as Shy8 and he'll tell you it's the biggest juggling act you could ever take on.

Once upon a time, the actor and now radio personality, was by day Tanjung Offshore Bhd corporate communications manager and at other times, a struggling actor and singer.

Until Usop Wilcha came along, that is introduced in 2008's *Zombi Kampung Pisang*, the character also gained a bigger following with a spotlight on the role in 2010's sleeper hit sequel *Hantu Kak Limah Balik Rumah*. Usop Wilcha is now a certified household name.

The role of Usop Wilcha is built upon the character created by director Mamat Khalid, and was further developed by Shy8 who decided to come up with his twist to the effeminate, wheelchair-riding, wrist flicking smart aleck.

The 46-year-old got his first break in Ambang Klasik's Aidilfitri telemovie *Doa Untuk Ayah* in 1997. He was also the production house's first talent signed by Ambang Klasik.

A year before, he produced, composed and wrote every word for his own songs for his debut album, *Terasing Di Bumi*

*Sendiri*. The title track became the HIV/AIDS awareness campaign song that year.

There was little success in between that. He was also picked by Mamat Khalid for guest roles in *Lang Buana* and *Man Laksa* before the whirlwind success of *Usop Wilcha*.

Finally. After years of trying, the actor has reached the crossroads of considering acting and a life in the entertainment business as a full time career with offers pouring in.

"It was at first indeed difficult to divide my time between the entertainment and corporate worlds, but now after two months, I'm really feeling the pressure," he said with a serious tone, and not even a hint of the comic appeal of *Usop Wilcha* was present.

"I can't give full commitment to both fields, hence I have decided to resign from my full time, day job." Strange, as it was never expected that he would turn to this profession as something that would be his day job.

"I never liked acting, and never got that many offers, and it took years before Mamat saw something that could be brought out for the people. And now, to be honest, I can't cope.

"I'm up by 4am, and in the conti by 5am. Then I have to shoot to the office, leaving little time for my family, especially my son which is just a year and a month old."

Hence, he took the bold move to tender his resignation even before he took on the offer by Hot FM, to avoid dissatisfaction among others in the company who may not sit well with him popping in and out as he pleased.

"I cannot be fair to them and this is the best decision. While the company has been supportive thus far, and reluctant in accepting my resignation to the point of being relaxed and allowing me to come in just once a week, I have to say I am tired and have no time for rest."

Shy8 said he made the decision as the newfound fame had taken its toll on him.

"I'm usually so tired and stressed, and it affects my clarity, and I end up being one of the zombies of Kampung Pisang! I also don't want people to say I'm taking advantage of the support given by my employers."

While it may not seem a traditionally wise move, with little job security in the uncertain entertainment industry, Shy8 said security is subjected to interpretation.

"There is no such thing as security. Anything can happen, and I just have to make hay while the sun shines. The security I get now according to my plans as of now, is working hard over the next two years which may just pay off in delivering the same income compared to eight years in a day job."

He said it was up to each person to make the most of the situation.

"I don't know what would happen if a new management came in, or if I'm discarded — so I'm grabbing the opportunity when it's there. And that's my message to everyone out there too, to grab the opportunities presented to you and not regret it once it's passed."

He hasn't planned for anything in the long run, and it may seem a little foolhardy to some, but Shy8 is confident of his move.

"I haven't planned on starting up my own company or starting my own production, but right now further down the line, I just plan to take time off to rest after reaping the benefits of my hard work."

Having experienced rejection much enough in the past, Shy8 took a swipe at those who chose to ride on names, and not talent.

"Right now, I'm getting a lot of offers from those who rejected me in the past. So do they want me for my talent, or just the current popularity of the success of *Usop Wilcha*? Many choose to cast

big names even in the crappiest of roles for just the sake of bankability."

And it's not just those people who irk him.

"Friends who never were in touch, relatives who suddenly claimed to be related, people who are suddenly nice despite ignoring me..."

Shy8 droned on of those who have popped out of the woodwork since he hit the big time.

"I really want to avoid offending people, but I do know why they suddenly want to be nice to me," he said firmly.

"There are those who claim to be friends, and suddenly expect favours. Now that I'm in the limelight, suddenly I have 'friends' who are upset I never had their numbers because they never contacted me, or demanding to be approved on Facebook though they were never close."

Indeed, the downside of *Usop Wilcha*'s success is revelation that many are

seeing Shy8 for the first time, and perhaps, not for the right reasons.

"I think producers and directors should allow more for new talents to grow and develop. Even Shaheizy Sam, is going through what I am, from no one even giving him a second glance to being one of the most sought-after actors."

He said the Indonesian film industry that pits new talents against each other was the way to go.

"That's supposed to be the way. Bankability is fine to a certain extent, but the search for new talents should be the real race. Big names don't promise paybacks as proven in the past with many flops despite star vehicles.

"Our audience is now matured, the pool of talent has grown and many deserve a chance, so don't narrow the scope down to a handful who are deemed 'bankable'"

And even his lukewarm

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singing career in past has been a focus.

"There have been offers for an album, but they want a comedy album with Usop Wilcha, and I'm not interested. I'll leave the comedy to Usop Wilcha on screen, and focus on me as Shy8, a singer if you do want me to do an album."

While it may sound like Shy8 is rather bitter over the success of his alter ego in Usop Wilcha, he shrugged and explained: "In other ways, I would love to be who I am, and not just Usop Wilcha all the time."

Still, he has love for the character which has catapulted him to fame, and strives not to cheapen the character by diluting it with just about every franchise possible.

"While there are numerous merchandise on sale with the Usop Wilcha brand, I don't intend to cash in. I even forbade my family to produce anything with the name despite them being interested to."

"I appreciate fans who create merchandise and just ask them to be responsible in doing so, not using my name, or saying it's endorsed and then failing to deliver thus spoiling my name."

His protective nature of Usop Wilcha includes his current stand to educate the public on what the character was all about.

"I have to make people understand that I'm no comedian. I am an actor, who just happened to bring the role well as Mamat Khalid pointed out. In fact, Usop Wilcha has no real funny lines, and works based on visual, just as a result of my acting."

Hence, it's a real challenge for Shy8 to take to radio, minus the visuals that make Usop Wilcha what he is.

"It's definitely different on radio as I don't have the

space, unlike when I act, or when I deliver motivational talks — but I think I'm getting the hang of it.

"Still, on radio, while I have to bring the character to life, it will be bits of the real me and that's what I want fans to understand as Usop Wilcha will always be only on film."

Which may be good news for fans still, considering Mamat Khalid is planning spin-off movies for the character.

Right now, I'm getting a lot of offers from those who rejected me in the past. So do they want me for my talent, or just the current popularity of the success of Usop Wilcha? Many choose to cast big names even in the crappiest of roles for just the sake of bankability.

— Shy8

