

UMS music recital, workshop a success

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KOTA KINABALU: Allegrow Music and UMS Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Heritage successfully organised "A Song & Piano Recital" classical music recital attended by a few hundred classical music fans last Saturday.

The recital featured Malaysia's Soprano singer Ang Mei Foong and pianist/song composer Wong Chee Yean who together gave an enchanting evening of song and piano performance at the UMS Recital Hall.

Ang Mei Foong's soprano voice was mellow, dulcet and soothing to the listeners. The audience was enthralled with selections from Frederic Chopin, Robert Stolz, Giuseppe Verdi, Wong Chee Yean, the pianist, Wong Chee Wei, and Yeo Chow Shern. Violinist and UMS lecturer Grace Lee featured as a guest performer.

Ang Mei Foong is the founder and artistic director of The Song Weavers, the Malaysian first vocal ensemble that is dedicated to the performance and programming of Art Songs.

Organiser, co-founder of Allegrow Music, Rachel Lee said, "The aim for this event is to cultivate the interest in music within our community."

Ticket sales proceeds sponsor underprivileged children at Woori Jib Orphanage in the form of music lessons and learning materials.

An Order of the Star of Italy knighthood ('Ordine della Stella D'Italia, l'onorificenza Cavaliere') recipient from the Italian President, Ang Mei Fong conducted music workshop for UMS music studies students on Sunday morning.

It was a prestigious recognition by the Italian government of her outstanding contribution to programming and performing vocal arts in the regions; followed with the Golden Medal Award from the Berliner International Music Competition in September 1, 2018; and most recently she received the award of the Best Solo Performance (Vocal) in the 16th Boh Cameron Arts Awards 2019, the most prestigious performing arts awards in Malaysia on last April 30, 2019.

As a music lecturer at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Ang Mei Foong also conducted masterclass for piano and vocals at the organisers' Allegrow Music Centre at T1 Bundusan on Sunday afternoon.

A multiple awards and scholarships winner, she was trained at the National Taiwan Normal University under Prof Ren Rong, Conservatorio di Musica Santa Cecilia under Maestro Rebecca Berg, and the

University of Melbourne under Merlyn Quaife.

As an award-winning soprano, she was a recipient of numerous academic scholarships during her study notably the "Melbourne International Fee Remission Scholarships" (MIFRS) and "Melbourne International Research Scholarships" (MIRS) when she pursued her studies in the University of Melbourne.

Other notable awards include the first prize winner of NTNU Vocal Concerto Competition of year 2002; 2nd prize winner of the Taiwan Rotary Club Artists' Awards of year 2002; the 8th prize winner, as well as a young artist award of "Mondial Chinese Vocalists Concours 2003"; and "Silver Medal Winner Award-Outstanding Achievement" in the Global Music Award, Oct 2014.

Ang Mei Foong has given several well received solo recitals in Kuala Lumpur, Taiwan, Macau, Rome and Melbourne, where she performed Robert Schumann's *Frauenliebe und Leben*, Gabriel Faure's *La Bonne Chanson*, Richard Strauss's *Vier letzte Lieder*, Aldo Finzi's *Art Songs*, Alban Berg's *Sieben frühe Lieder*, Joseph Canteloube's *Chants d'auvergne*, and appeared as the soprano soloist in Handel's *Ode for St. Cecilia's Day*, Handel's *Messiah*, and Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9*.

She has collaborated with a few major orchestras and ensembles in Malaysia, which include both the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra (MPO), and the Malaysian Philharmonic Youth Orchestra (MPYO), Kamerata String Ensemble and the Virama Ensemble.

She has worked with the conductors such as Lee Kok Leong, David Chin, Juan Montoya, Kevin Field, Ciarán McAuley, Fabio Mechetti, Sergio La Stella, Guillaume Tourniaire and Naohisa Furusawa.

In 2013, Ang Mei Foong made her Malaysia opera debut playing the title role in Bizet's opera *Carmen* with the EST opera company (now known as KL City Opera, KLCO in Kuala Lumpur).

Ang Mei Foong is actively involved in the Malaysian contemporary music industry and had given world première to the vocal works by the Malaysian composers along with many internationally acclaimed musicians and orchestra, including MPO and the Society of Malaysian Contemporary Composers (SMCC).

She is also an active researcher in the field of voice rehabilitation, specifically for patients with chronic diseases. Her present research work looks into the effects of singing on people with Parkinson's Disease.



From left - Violinist Grace Lee, Pianist Wong Chee Yean and Soprano Ang Mei Foong.

Should music be taught in schools?

SHOULD music be intensively taught in national schools, other than private schools like in international schools? Some private tuition music schools or teachers benefitted from a pool of eager parents and their talented children.

Notably some private schools here excel in music education, with their own school brass band or Chinese musical orchestra. Some have lion dance drums beating troupes. Such achievements are not evident in national schools.

Ang Mei Foong: "Government schools follow the national curriculum, and music education is no longer compulsory."

She said while Chinese private Schools have their own curriculum, and music education is an elective subject.

United Chinese Schools' Committee Association of Malaysia (Ucscam) which is a non-government organisation, has its curriculum bureau to take care of the schools' curriculum development.

It had published three complete music textbooks for junior music classroom teaching since 1998.

In 2005, it conducted a survey using questionnaires, interviews and observations on school's music education implementation, the music teachers' background, the current music teaching materials, the music teaching equipment, the extracurricular music activities, the methods of assessments and the teachers' general opinion to help it to know comprehensively the overall development of the recent music education implementation among all Chinese Private Schools in Malaysia, aiming to construct a brighter future for the schools.

The Chinese Private High Schools' curriculum is written based on the national educa-



The recital poster at UMS.

tion curriculum, but is modified to be more adaptive for the students to be taught in the student's mother-tongue language (Chinese language).

However, for the music education in Chinese Private High Schools, due to the influence of the British thinking, very little attention has been paid to either the Malaysian traditional music (these including Malay Malaysian, Chinese Malaysian, Indian Malaysian and other music culture in the country), or any other music culture of the world except Western European music cultures.

Over generations, baroque vocal music has been placed an important role for voice training.

"The vast reservoir of baroque vocal music ranging from Bach, Handel, and Vivaldi is an essential repertoire list for many new singers.

"However, many of us seemed unaware to the stylistic approach when performing these pieces, partly because most singers are

over concerned on the voice technical development, and many are lacked of knowledge to the appropriate manner to the early music performance."

Chinese Private High Schools in Malaysia has undergone educational reforms since 2005. The reforms started after the educators realised the importance of integrating the local elements into the educational system.

To be independent from foreign country's curriculum and to focus on the local heritage become part of the weight bearing point in the educational reform.

The objective of this change is to draw back the attention from others to the local heritage. The culture in Malaysia is multiple, music culture itself is also multiple, thus, multicultural music education is very much emphasised in the new music curriculum.

However, the changing of the music curriculum was not to phase out Western European music tradition from the curriculum, but is to make the curriculum reflects multiculturalism.

To achieve this goal, local musical heritage such as the Malay Gamelan, Caklempong, the Chinese orchestra, Chinese Opera, the Indian Sitar, and the Sabah native music like Kadazan music beat would feature in the new music curriculum.

Towards the understanding of the concept and its historical perspective of the forming of multicultural music education in the world; the importance and the methodologies of promoting multicultural music education, have become the crucial element in reforming a new music curriculum to the Chinese Private High Schools in Malaysia, and this may help to influence whether music should be considered as an elective subject in national schools.