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We must treasure those who are truly talented

Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music

The Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music of NUS last year accepted 15 year old violinist Loh Jun Hong for enrolment, this year it enrolled 14 year old pianist Abigail Sin, showing a trend of enrolling increasingly younger undergraduates. Has the issue of the emotion quotient of these young prodigies been considered by NUS?

Dr Gene Aitken, the director of the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, explained during the interview "We do not regard their young age as a problem. Generally, we do not accept students that are too young unless the student has exceptional musical talent, good academic results, and maturity of thought. It is only when these three criteria are satisfied that we would accept the student. Ultimately, it is our hope that their admission to the conservatory will pave the way for their future success, and not their failure."

Regarding the various young undergraduates, the Conservatory had sought the views of the Principals and teachers of their respective secondary schools, considered their performances at international music competitions, how often they have performed with orchestras etc in deciding if they should be offered enrolment.

Dr Aitken, 69, said "Abigail Sin performed with the Lamont Symphony Orchestra in Denver last year. I happened to be in Denver at the same time. That performance was on her 13th birthday and she performed exceptionally well. With young talents of her caliber, if she does not join NUS at this time, other universities will enroll her. We must not miss out on such talents."

This year, Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music has 48 new students, many of whom come from China, Japan and Korea, amongst them are many 15 to 16 years old.

"We are a new music conservatory," said Dr Aitken, "and in order to raise our profile, we send our teachers to foreign countries to conduct master classes, and through these master classes we build up our relationship with foreign teachers and students. We give them the opportunity to hear our teachers perform as well as giving us an opportunity to assess the standards of the students. Further, we encourage our students to participate in various outstanding and well-known international music competitions and festivals so their performance can become the bill board of the conservatory."

This year marks the 4th year of student enrolment for the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music. Student population now stands at 181. In the next two years, the Conservatory will enroll 4 students annually for studies in recording arts and technique. The student population will grow to approximately 200 in the near future.

Dr Aitken explained, "A state of the art recording studio will be ready in one to two years time, and when that studio is ready we will enroll the remaining students. The program of studies in recording arts and technique require that students have a good understanding of music as well as the abilities to master recording equipments and electronic engineering. This will be a 5-year course leading to a bachelor degree.

EDITORIAL STAFF