

VIOLIN VIOLA CELLO BASS FIDDLE

# STRINGS

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## Singapore Strings

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New Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music showcases talent and a city's grand ambitions.

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What sets the YST Conservatory apart from others in Asia? For one thing, the language of instruction is entirely English, which helps prepare the mostly non-Anglephone graduates to enter the music industry almost anywhere in the world. Another is the ongoing Peabody connection, which provides both brand identity and regular exchange of faculty and students. Then there is the integration of technology and learning. High-tech is everywhere, from "smart" classrooms, equipped with technology to be integrated into the teaching process, to music technology labs.

"One of the major initiatives of the conservatory is to integrate technology into the classrooms so that our students are prepared to embrace technology in an ever-changing global music industry," says Gene Aitken, former director of the conservatory.

YST also requires students to take non-vocational courses in other subject areas (Mandarin and computer technology are popular), especially the humanities. Greg Petersen, formerly a professional bassist, teaches five different courses that integrate cultural traditions with music.

Students perform more than 100 concerts each academic year. Part of the curriculum involves mandatory participation in the Thursday Noon Recital Series, which has become a popular draw across the 32,000-student NUS campus. The conservatory orchestra has a new music director, Singaporean-raised Wang Ya-Hui. Wang, a graduate of both the Curtis Institute and Peabody, has extensive experience working with orchestras in Detroit, Baltimore, Akron, and Taipei. The concert she conducted as part of the opening ceremonies combined rock-solid discipline with a keen sense of musicianship. With eyes closed, only someone with an experienced ear could detect Wang was leading a student orchestra.

Over and above its strong faculty, YST offers a special attraction to students of string instruments. Few outside of Singapore know about the Rin Collection of rare stringed instruments. Rin Kai Mei, a modest Singaporean entrepreneur and philanthropist, and his wife have collected more than 150 fine instruments, which they loan out to needy students, strings and insurance included. There are Amatis, Stradivaris, Guarnieris, Goffrilleris, Tononis and many, many others.

"I believe the future of classical music resides in Asia, particularly in China," says Robert Sirota, president of the Manhattan School of Music and former director of the Peabody Institute. "Singapore's deep commitment to creating itself as a global city for the arts shows great foresight since it is positioned as a leading gateway to China culturally, geographically, and financially."

"The Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music stands as a testament to the vision of all Singaporeans."

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