



Jeremy Monteiro leading the National University of Singapore Jazz Band in a rehearsal. The arts event has a musical starring the jazz maestro and students. PHOTO: NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

Jazzing up NUS arts festival with music

Lisabel Ting

The campus will come alive with the sound of music at this year's National University of Singapore (NUS) Arts Festival.

Over two weekends later this month, the university will present a host of performances, exhibitions and concerts as part of its 10th annual gala.

This year's focus is music and festival highlights include a musical starring university students alongside veterans such as jazz maestro Jeremy Monteiro and singer Rani Singam. Also, young stars such as pianist Abigail Sin and violinist Alan Choo will put on classical performances.

Director of the festival Christine Khor says the focus on music is "to show the width and depth of artistic life in NUS Centre For the Arts and NUS".

"It encourages curiosity, experimentation and innovation in creating new works and new interpretations," she says.

Working with professional artists, she adds, will inspire students and "set benchmarks to be aspired to".

The focus of the festival changes from year to year. Last year, it was theatre. The year before, it was dance.

The upcoming festival opens with the musical *Words And Music: A Love Story Told In Jazz*. The collaboration involves Monteiro, playwright Wang Liangsheng, the NUS Jazz Band and several NUS alumni.

Ms Tong Miin, a third-year law student, is vice-president of the band. She says that during rehearsals, Monteiro brought in professional musicians to play alongside the different sections of the band. "Listening to how they play and watching them is inspiring and makes me want to be better," she says. "Not only do we get to see them in action, but they also chat with us between rehearsals, giving advice and sharing their experiences."

She is also grateful for the chance to work with an established musician such as Monteiro.

"When he plays, we can see how he doesn't just

play the notes, but also conveys the emotion of the song. He also has good rapport with the band members."

For Monteiro, mentoring the student musicians is also a chance to encourage them.

"The students are serious hobbyists, not concert musicians or those who want to turn professional. I try to ask them to keep the flame burning, so they don't lose interest."

His advice is to practise 15 minutes every day, even in the middle of examinations or busy periods.

"Their colleagues in sports will surely go jogging on a regular basis or do simple exercises even if they don't do the full training."

Another highlight of the festival is *Intempo 2015: Singapore Panorama* by the NUS Wind Symphony and The NUSChoir, conducted by associate professor Ho Hwee Long, assistant conductor Francis Tan and Dr Zechariah Goh Toh Chai. They will be performing works by Singaporean and international composers.

One piece which will be familiar to anyone who grew up in Singapore is the folk song *Dayong Sampan*, written for symphony orchestra by the late Cul-

tural Medallion recipient Leong Yoon Pin.

He was the mentor of Dr Goh, who is now the head of composition studies at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts. Dr Goh is, in turn, the teacher of Ernest Thio, a student, and the pair have collaborated to arrange *Dayong Sampan* for the wind ensemble.

Thio says he learnt a lot from his teacher, especially when he took a course in writing choral music, in which he gained experience with ethnic music.

Meanwhile, Dr Goh says his contact with the late Leong has been invaluable in arranging the music. "I knew Mr Leong and I'd heard this work performed a few times when he was alive, so I have an idea of how it should sound.

"If there are some things which get lost in translation, I'll be able to guide him."

View it

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE ARTS FESTIVAL 2015

Where: National University of Singapore campus
When: March 20 to 29
Info: Go to www.nusartsfestival.com