

# Music majors and festival for 15th anniversary

The Yong Siew Toh Conservatory is adding two music majors to broaden students' career prospects

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Arts Correspondent

The Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music at the National University of Singapore (NUS) is opening more career paths for students.

It is celebrating its 15th year by introducing two new majors this month for its bachelor's of music degree programme.

There will also be a six-day music festival from today to Sunday.

The new majors – music and society; and music, collaboration and production – improve career prospects, allowing the students to go beyond specialising in an orchestral instrument, piano or voice.

They can take classes such as business for musicians and NUS modules like South-east Asian studies and communications and new media.

Those pursuing music and society majors can enter the fields of library sciences, media and publishing.

Those with music, collaboration and production majors can go on to careers in music app development, arts venue management and music production.

The new majors respond to the interests and aptitudes of local students, said the conservatory's dean Bernard Lanskey. About 40 per cent of the 220 full-time undergraduates are Singaporean.

Third-year undergraduate Cui Yihao, 20, has switched from majoring in the trumpet to the new major in music, collaboration and production.

He wants to work on multi-disciplinary projects – like Fix(.) the Musical, which he presented on campus with other students in February – and learn to juggle the roles of performer and producer.

"Production is an often overlooked part of the music business," he said. "The fact is that we have to make money once we're out of

school and it isn't as simple as just being able to play music well.

"It's a pretty saturated industry where jobs are rare and the majority of the population aren't going to be paying much for music."

The conservatory was mooted in 1998, as Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam – then deputy prime minister – visited The Johns Hopkins University's noted music school Peabody Institute. In 2001, NUS and Peabody signed an agreement to set up the conservatory.

It took in its first cohort of 70 students in 2003 and, in 2011, started offering a joint music degree with Peabody, the first in Asia.

The conservatory gets between 300 and 400 applications every year for the 50 first-year places in the four-year bachelor of music (honours) programme.

The undergraduate programme is fully funded by donors, including the Yong Loo Lin trust.

Alumni have made waves. Conductor Wong Kah Chun won the prestigious Gustav Mahler Conducting Competition in 2016.

Composer-conductor Chen Zhangyi has conducted the Tokyo Philharmonic, had his work recorded by the London Philharmonic and his Vanda Concerto was a highlight of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra's (SSO) National Day concert earlier this month.

Both will perform today at a gala concert at the Conservatory Concert Hall, kicking off music festival Voyage.

More concerts have been programmed till Sunday, featuring alumni such as violinist Alan Choo, pianist Abigail Sin and composer plus piano-accordionist Syafiqah 'Adha Sallehin.

Syafiqah, 28, who will perform on Sunday, is known for melodies with a pan-Malayan style, such as Ikan Girl, featured at the 2016 Singapore International Festival of Music; and Bidasari, played by the SSO during its National Day concert this month.



"All the influences I've had through my studies have helped me create a different kind of sound," she noted.

"It was such a life-changing thing for me, also bringing in my culture and music to show the sound that Singapore can produce."

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• For details on the music festival Voyage, go to [www.ystmusic.nus.edu.sg/events](http://www.ystmusic.nus.edu.sg/events). Admission is free, but registration is required.

## BOOK IT / CELEBRATING 15 YEARS: PEABODY-YST GALA CONCERT

**WHERE:** Conservatory Concert Hall, Yong Siew Toh Conservatory, 3 Conservatory Drive

**WHEN:** Tomorrow, 7.30pm

**ADMISSION:** Free with registration at [www.eventbrite.sg/e/y-st-peabody-gala-concert-tickets-46711926630](http://www.eventbrite.sg/e/y-st-peabody-gala-concert-tickets-46711926630)

## VOYAGE: AND BEYOND

**WHERE:** Conservatory Orchestra Hall, Yong Siew Toh Conservatory, 3 Conservatory Drive

**WHEN:** Sunday, 3pm

**ADMISSION:** Free with registration at [www.eventbrite.sg/e/voyage-2018-alternative-new-tickets-47207923169](http://www.eventbrite.sg/e/voyage-2018-alternative-new-tickets-47207923169)

Alumni of the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory, (from left) Abigail Sin, Alan Choo, Chen Zhangyi and Syafiqah 'Adha Sallehin, who will perform at the Voyage: And Beyond music festival. ST PHOTO: JOYCE FANG