

Scholarship grooms new generation of organists

It was 20-year-old Anne Maria Lim's first time operating the huge and complicated sound machine all by herself in a hall packed with hundreds of people, who were all relying on her to do the right thing.

It started well, but as the ceremony progressed, she got confused by the sequence, not helped by the profusion of drawknobs, buttons and pedals spread out before her like an airplane cockpit, where pressing the wrong thing or not pressing the right one could end in sonic disaster.

"I panicked when it was time for the choir to sing, and I played lots of wrong notes," said Ms Lim, who was playing during mass at the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd.

However, she quickly recovered

and led the congregation in an evening of hymn-singing.

"You have to know what the choir is doing, what the priest is doing and what you're doing," she added.

There is no better way to learn than by doing, and this is what the Cathedral Organ Scholar Programme is about.

Ms Lim, a third-year Bachelor of Music with Honours candidate at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts who also plays the piano and violin, is one of six in the programme, started by the cathedral in January with the support of an anonymous, non-Catholic donor who has pledged \$35,000 a year.

The programme, for up to 10 students, awards scholarships amounting to about \$3,000 annually and in-

cludes membership in the Singapore Chapter of the American Guild of Organists (AGO).

The organ scholars also learn disciplines such as Latin and conducting. They "graduate" when they can play at mass without assistance.

Cathedral organist Alphonsus Chern, 37, who directs the Cathedral Organ Scholar Programme, said many churches here have rejected the pipe organ in favour of pianos or Yamaha electones, which do not have the full sound needed to support a congregation's singing.

According to Dr Evelyn Lim, dean of the Singapore Chapter of the AGO, there are probably fewer than 100 people here trained to play traditional pipe organs.

Dr Lim, who teaches all six organ scholars, said the new programme opens up a potential for a "dramatic turnaround" in the quality of church music.

Lin Yangchen



Ms Nadine Wong (left) and Ms Anne Maria Lim, two of six candidates in the Cathedral Organ Scholar Programme, at the organ of the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd. Scholars "graduate" when they can play at mass without assistance.
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