

OPEN SCORE PROJECT



Open Score Project is a uniquely Singaporean ensemble founded in 2018 by NAFA music alumnus and pipa player Gildon Choo (top left) whose sound uniquely converges various ethnic musical cultures of the world.

Joining Gildon from NAFA's School of Music are the following music alumni:

- Rozie Hoong, BA (Hons) Music, 2011 (Ensemble member)
- Eunice Koh, Bachelor Of Music With Honours, 2017 (Ensemble member)
- Indra Chen, Bachelor Of Music (Hons), 2015 (Guest musician)
- Jacky Ng, Diploma in Music, 2018 (Guest musician)
- Eugene Toh, Bachelor of Music (Honours), 2013 (Guest musician)

The multi-ethnic ensemble consists of many non-NAFA musicians as well.

1. Thanks for accepting this interview. Please share with us your creative journey after graduating from NAFA!

Hey Sophie! Thank you for the invite to share as an alumni of NAFA!

After graduation, I must admit I had quite a difficult time deciding if pursuing music full-time was what I really wanted. I am never one for an office job nor a fixed daily routine, sometimes I wish I were. However, I truly enjoy interacting and connecting with people. I placed my focus elsewhere for 4 years, working at a bar and later supervising at a cafe. However, that did not stop me from performing; the itch persisted!

Over the years, I had the opportunity to work with many local musicians and made many new friends. I got in touch with very traditional forms of art that I never had a chance to learn about hands-on, such as Peking Opera, Cantonese Opera, Indian Classical Music and others. I also got roped into many projects and it was an eye-opening experience for me.

At a later point of my creative journey, I realized my passion for connecting people could be placed into community art and outreach. I then decided to go back into music by teaching and taking on collaborative projects and many opera shows.

Namhwa Opera, currently a Major Grant Company which focuses on traditional Teochew arts, gave me the platform to channel my creative thoughts into programming interesting projects to bring traditional arts to the community.



2. What prompted you to start OSP?

Mainly my passion for connecting with people.

Open Score Project was founded in 2018. And over the years of working with so many musicians from diverse cultural backgrounds and seeing so many projects during the SG50 phase that promotes racial harmony, I thought of creating an ensemble that is "uniquely Singaporean", an ensemble that not only promotes the main ethnic groups, but includes the cultural influences of those within Singapore.

We are not shy of showing our differences within the ensemble, many of us read and play music differently, but all these differences can marry and blend in together as one interesting sound. I think it truly reflects what it means to be Singaporean - being accepting of a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-lingual society.

3. What are some highlights for the group so far?

In 2019, Open Score Project has had the honour of performing overseas. We traveled to Hanoi, Vietnam, for the Singapore Festival, and brought along our rendition of popular folk tunes which showcases the kind of diversity we have to the audience in Vietnam. We also took part in the 1st Bakhshi Art Festival in Termez, Uzbekistan, presenting an original concept of story-telling with music. We also went to Shanghai, China, for a celebration of Singapore Day with Ministry of Culture, Community & Youth (MCCY) and Mediacorp. Earlier this year, we also took part in a performance for River Hong Bao, a Chinese new year carnival, performing alongside mediacorp artistes.

All of these experiences were great fun and learning opportunities for us!



4. How did you decide on which instruments to add to OSP? Is there a particular model that you went for, such as Yo-yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble?

This is a good question.

When working with diversity, we must always try to maintain a good balance; ethnicity, instrumentation and even gender! The first people I approach usually are people around me. These musicians represent their community well, champion for their cultural music and play a role by adding their musical language and musicianship into the ensemble. Actually some musicians voiced their interest by writing to us. We cannot say 'No' to such musicians, because that is the kind of passion we need! So of course they must enjoy working with people of different ethnic backgrounds, or simply put... first and foremost, they must love people. Then we look into instrumentation and consider how the timbre can create interesting tone colours.

OSP held her debut concert last year, where we explored interesting instrumentations such as; a Suona duo against a multitude of percussion instruments ranging from Frame Drum, Jidur, Teochew Gong & Drums to Mridangam, and a quintet of Morin Khuur, Angklung, Cello and Guzheng. It is a touchy subject on skin colour because ultimately Open Score Project is not selling multiculturalism on a surface level by ensuring there is a variety of musicians that look a certain way. But to our audience, some of them will expect a group that promotes cultural diversity to visually have that representation. So therefore, sometimes we do consider that form of balance. That said, it still boils down to people and instrumentation as our guiding principle in choosing musicians.

OSP in concert



5. What do you hope to achieve with your group?

We hope to create more understanding between different cultural landscapes in Singapore and to connect communities together one note at a time.

I have a personal saying that goes "if musicians with different background, beliefs and very different approach to music can come together in one moment to create good music, imagine what good people can do if they do the same."

6. Please share some National Day wishes for our alumni community!

It is disheartening to see so much political struggle in the world, but yet heartening to also see people coming together to make a difference. I think it is not a political statement to identify as a Singaporean. Let us put our focus at what it means to be a Singaporean. I hope our alumni can use their craft to help give voice to people, to enrich their lives, to remind people of what it means to connect with others and also celebrate being Singaporean (at least for this National Day period!).
Have a good holiday everyone!

HAPPY 55th NATIONAL DAY TO ALL ALUMNI!





International Bakhshi Art Festival in Termez, Uzbekistan

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- Gildon, Diploma in Music, 2008



Singapore Day 2019 at Shanghai, China



Singapore Festival 2019 in Hanoi, Vietnam