

SCO, Nafa partnership to boost Chinese classical music scene

The three-year agreement will provide more performance, learning and career opportunities for Nafa students

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Moses Gay, the Singapore Chinese Orchestra's (SCO) youngest associate conductor to date, has received tutelage from eminent conductors such as Roberto Paternostro and Martin Sieghart and other top musicians around the world.

But two teachers from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Nafa) stood out as his mentors – Mr James Yap and Dr Rebecca Kan.

Mr Yap, who is an adjunct lecturer with Nafa, met Gay outside school to offer advice on his studies and career.

Dr Kan, Nafa's vice-dean of the Pedagogy and Research unit, would encourage him whenever he felt like giving up as a conductor. She also checked in on him when she was on a Nafa business trip in China, where Gay was doing his master's in orchestral conducting at the China Conservatory of Music.

"Music studies aside, these two mentors showered care and concern on my well-being when I was at a crossroads between continuing music studies or not," says Gay, 37. "The encouragement and advice from them made me not just a better musician, but also a better person."

Last Friday, SCO and Nafa inked a three-year agreement at Nafa's Lee Foundation Theatre for the preservation and promotion of traditional Chinese arts, music and culture. Both will advance Chinese music here, while providing more performance, learning and career opportunities for Nafa students.

The memorandum of understanding was signed by SCO executive director Terence Ho and Nafa president Tan-Soh Wai Lan. It was witnessed by Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Edwin Tong, who is also Second Minister for Law.

The ceremony was followed by a chamber music concert showcasing nine SCO musicians and seven Nafa students.

Gay, who is also a student of renowned erhu master Zhang Yuming, has a Bachelor of Arts in music from Nafa, which he graduated from



Singapore Chinese Orchestra members and Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts alumni (front row from left) Koh Min Hui, Jonathan Ngeow, Lo Chai Xia, (back row from left) Wong Qin Kai, Ann Hong Mui, Moses Gay and Benjamin Boo at the Singapore Conference Hall. ST PHOTO: SAMUEL ANG

in 2010 with first class honours.

In 2011, he was appointed a conducting assistant at the SCO. He became its assistant conductor in 2014 and its associate conductor last year. He is also associate conductor of the Singapore National Youth Chinese Orchestra (SNYCO) and music director of the National University of Singapore Chinese Orchestra.

He says: "I hope that SCO and SNYCO will be able to play a part in growing and grooming the next generation of Chinese orchestral musicians and administrators from Nafa, providing performance platforms and opportunities at SNYCO and turning them into our colleagues at the SCO."

Besides Gay, other Nafa alumni who are with the SCO are zhongruan associate principal Lo Chai

Xia, zhongruan musician Koh Min Hui, erhu musician Ann Hong Mui, ruan musician Jonathan Ngeow, zhonghu musician Wong Qin Kai and percussionist Benjamin Boo.

As of last month, the number of Singaporean SCO orchestra members stands at 54 out of 84 musicians, including the six from Nafa.

Nafa's Mrs Tan-Soh says since 2009, the SCO and Nafa have been working hand in hand to foster a more vibrant Chinese music ecosystem by nurturing budding musicians.

"Our students have had the privilege of viewing SCO's closed-door rehearsals, learning from fruitful internship opportunities, and performing on stage alongside SCO musicians," she adds.

SCO's Mr Ho says the partner-

ship will help identify opportunities for Nafa students to gain work experience in the orchestra, and offer platforms for integrated programmes in Chinese instrumental studies.

He notes that many of the SCO's musicians are also instrumental adjuncts teaching at Nafa's Chinese music department. There are also a few SNYCO members who are from current and past batches of Nafa students.

Over the past decade, Nafa's Chinese instrumentalist graduates have had more diversified pathways. Besides joining the SCO, some have thriving careers in local institutions like the School of the Arts, or have formed ensembles such as Ding Yi Music Company, Reverberance, StringWerkz, The Nanyang Collective and Musa.

The Nafa-SCO partnership will include industry exposure opportunities for Nafa students through four closed SCO rehearsals annually, as well as regular internship openings and modular credits as part of their SNYCO training.

An annual collaboration through the Campus Rhapsody concert series and SCO's Music Tapas programme will give students a public platform to perform alongside their lecturers and SCO musicians. The SCO will also hold workshops and arts management talks for Nafa students.

Both Nafa and the SCO hope the partnership will give more opportunities for budding Chinese classical musicians to make their mark here and beyond.

They can also look forward to Singapore's new university of the arts,

which will be formed by an alliance between Nafa and Lasalle College of the Arts in a few years. It will be a private university supported by the Government, with Lasalle and Nafa remaining as distinct schools offering their own programmes.

Mr Ho, a former Nominated MP who said in 2019 that Singapore should consider granting full university status to both Nafa and Lasalle, says: "I believe Nafa's School of Music and its Chinese instrumental studies will take tertiary music education to greater heights, on a par with world-renowned music conservatories – enabling our youth with strengths and talent in this field to maximise their potential and contribute to our economy and our society."

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