

SCO News 新加坡华乐团讯息

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Mega-concert aims to create new world record for largest Chinese drum ensemble in performance

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Arts Correspondent

Assembling a mega-concert is no small feat. On Saturday, about 230 buses and lorries will ferry performers and musical instruments to the Singapore Sports Hub for what will be the biggest event organised here by a Chinese orchestra.

Expected to draw a paying audience of about 30,000, Our People, Our Music, features 5,000 musicians and singers and aims to pioneer a new entry in the Guinness World Records for the largest Chinese drum ensemble in performance.

"Drums are the easiest instrument to get people to play together," says Quek Ling Kiong, 47, resident conductor of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra (SCO), which is organising the mega-concert.

He will lead the Guinness World Records attempt in which about 1,000 drummers will perform Singapore composer Phang Kok Jun's Power Singapura!, accompanied by the rest of the musicians and singers on the hand-held pallet drum. "It's a challenge," adds Quek. "Where do we get all the people and where do we get all the drums?"

The call for participants went out last August and by February, 127 ensembles from schools, community centres and clan associations had signed up. In total, there will be 3,736 orchestra members and 1,297 choir members, all also attempting to set new Singapore records for the largest Chinese Orchestra performance, the largest erhu ensemble (for the song Horse Racing by Chinese composer Huang Hai Huai) and the largest Chinese drum ensemble.

Performers will go through a turnstile before walking on stage, with an auditor and a Guinness World Records representative standing by to confirm the number of participants.

Musicians and singers range from primary school pupils to those in their 80s.

Eleven-year-old Joey Tan from Jurong Primary School will play the liu-



Music director Yeh Tsung (left) relayed his instructions on two large video screens at a rehearsal attended by about 3,800 members (above). The different ensembles, including Jurong Green Chinese Orchestra (below right), also practise separately for the mega-concert Our People, Our Music 2014.

5,000 perform, 30,000 listen

overall cost of the event – patron sponsors are Temasek International, Tote Board and the National Arts Council – but it is feeding and transporting the participants and providing red T-shirts for them. It has also ordered thousands of pallet drums of various sizes from China – the smallest costs \$2 each and the largest about \$6 – for the Guinness World Records attempt and for participants to take home as souvenirs.

The SCO's first mega-concert was in 2000, featuring 1,000 performers, while in 2004, it recruited 2,300 performers at the Sin-

Bend Symphony Orchestra in the United States but has never tried anything like this there.

He says: "At one rehearsal here, we had more than 3,000 people, but when I stood at my podium, it took them only five seconds to quieten down. In many countries, this is unthinkable."

Asked why he wants to put together mega-concerts, he laughs and says: "Because music can connect all these people. This is something way beyond the Chinese Orchestra."

Indeed, the programme is diverse, beginning with the portentous introduction from Richard Strauss' Also Sprach Zarathustra. The line-up includes a



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OUR PEOPLE, OUR MUSIC 2014

Where: National Stadium
When: Saturday, 7.30pm
Admission: Limited \$10, \$20 and \$100 tickets available from the Singapore Sports Hub (call 6333-5000 or go to sportshubtix.sg or a SingPost outlet)
Info: The audience is advised to take public transport, be there early for security screening and keep belongings to a minimum



school will play the yangqin (Chinese mandolin) with the Jurong Green Chinese Orchestra and says she is excited about Saturday's concert. "I feel happy because there will be lots of people. I am not scared because all my friends will be there."

The SCO declined to reveal the



gapore Indoor Stadium to celebrate Singapore's 39th birthday.

The orchestra's music director, Yeh Tsung, 63, says he can conceive of concerts on such a grand scale only in Singapore - he also leads the South

Caribbean. The line up includes a medley of songs popularised by late Chinese singer Teresa Teng, plus works from Singapore composers such as Phoon Yew Tien and Dick Lee.

The scale of the event means finding rehearsal space has been a challenge. Two mass rehearsals of orchestra and choir will be held at the new National Stadium on Friday and before the Saturday performance. Strings, percussion and choir have gathered and practised separately so far, with 1,000 percussion players filling two floors of the Singapore Conference Hall, for example.

Only one rehearsal on April 26 brought together close to 3,800 members of the orchestra at the Singapore Expo Hall 2. Maestro Yeh's instructions were relayed on two large video screens but, even then, there was a time lag before musicians picked up their cues.

For the drum ensemble, conductor Quek has set up 20 people to act as "sub-conductors to relay the instructions".

He repeats the words of his mentor Yeh: "We not only want to strive to have

a record, but we also want a good quality sound."

Participants are taking this to heart, with ensembles practising separately as well. The 40-strong Char Yong Hakka Choir rehearses once a week at their space in the Char Yong building in Geylang. Choir members are more used to singing songs in dialect and members in their 70s and 80s speak limited English, making songs such as Dick Lee's Home a challenge.

Choir leader Dorothy Chow, 65, says: "I try to use different dialects to approximate the pronunciation of the words. I teach them and they learn by heart."

It has also been a learning experience for twins Nur Mahirah Sukairi and Nur Najilah Sukairi, both 11 and pupils at Rulang Primary School. Mahirah plays the stringed erhu and Najilah plays the yangqin (hammered dulcimer).

"I like to try new things. I like to try every race's music," says Mahirah, explaining why she and her sister joined

their school's Chinese orchestra and also practise with the Boon Lay Chinese Orchestra.

Najilah adds: "The melody is so nice, I like it. But I'm very, very nervous."

The scale of the performance is daunting even for professionals such as SCO's young assistant conductor-in-residence Moses Gay, 29, who is leading the large erhu ensemble on Saturday. "I was kind of nervous, all these people, how am I going to talk to them? You have to think a step ahead of the sound that comes out. If we know that the members are slowing down, we have to slow down a few seconds ahead."

But after a couple of rehearsals, he now feels only excitement and some nostalgia. He played the erhu at the 2004 mega-concert and is looking forward to his more prominent role in Saturday's event. "This is something we haven't seen for 10 years. Trust me, they are all very good. We will make it."

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Twins Nur Mahirah Sukairi (above left) and Nur Najilah Sukairi (right), who are performing at the mega-concert, hope to try every race's music.

PHOTOS: SEAH KWANG PENG, LIM YAOHUI FOR THE STRAITS TIMES, SINGAPORE CHINESE ORCHESTRA