

Source: Sunday, September 20, 2015 | The Sunday Times

Blind erhu player takes solo concert performance in her stride

Amelia Teng

It took Ms Stephanie Ow more than five months to memorise the two musical pieces she performed yesterday in a concert.

All but blind since five, the 19-year-old cannot read music scores, so she commits them to memory by listening to recordings over and over again.

But in front of 780 people at the Singapore Conference Hall, with the Singapore Chinese Orchestra (SCO) accompanying her, she performed her solo pieces on the erhu – a Chinese fiddle – without a hitch.

The concert is sponsored by Deutsche Bank and is part of its collaboration with the SCO.

The bank also offers a scholarship to help talented and disadvantaged young people on a case-by-case basis.

Ms Ow, who was its first recipi-

ent, is on a three-year scholarship leading to a degree in music at Singapore Raffles Music College. She started the course in March.

Ms Annie Yeo, head, corporate responsibility Asia at Deutsche Bank, said Ms Ow's situation "fit the criteria perfectly – creating access to education for disadvantaged children to enable them to become the person they were born to be".

In 2001, she was diagnosed with retinal dystrophy.

In the same year, her parents left her with her aunt and uncle, who lived in Sengkang, and she has since never seen her mother again. Her father visits her occasionally.

It was her Taoist priest uncle, Mr Lee Leong Seng, who encouraged her to learn the erhu in Secondary 1. The former Ahmad Ibrahim Secondary School student went for erhu lessons at the Liberal Music and Arts School, a private music school at Hong Lim Complex.



Ms Ow (in blue) rehearsing with the Singapore Chinese Orchestra. PHOTO: DIOS VINCOY JR FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

Her classes were mainly funded by the North East Community Development Council.

"I started learning the erhu for fun, so I didn't expect to get so far," said Ms Ow.

She only started learning to read braille music scores last year, but for the most of the last five years, she "reads" scores by listening to the music.

"I take a longer time than most people," she said, adding that she did not mind it. "Music helps me express my feelings."

Yesterday's concert also featured a performance by 25 children from the Rainbow Centre, which operates special needs schools.

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