

The Malaysian Wind Music Prize

A report by Howard Ng

Background

The idea of organizing a competition for wind instruments is by no means original. However, back in 2013, a competition that was focussed on developing the professional career of a wind player did not yet exist in Malaysia.

During my time at the National Symphony Orchestra in Kuala Lumpur, I observed a tremendous vacuum in the growth of wind instrumentalists in the country. Having performed in more than a dozen countries around the world, I realized that this was nothing unusual; the dominance of the piano and string instruments in Western musical education is a common situation (with the exception of countries such as Taiwan, Korea and Japan, where the distribution is far more equal).

However in Malaysia, the standard of wind playing is growing in rates far slower than that of our neighbouring countries. This was something that bothered me, and so I thought to myself that perhaps something could be done to potentially change the situation.

My stake in the growth of the industry is not merely a personal one; there are an estimated 200 bands (pancaragam) all of all sizes and standards, of which about 180 originate from primary or secondary schools, translating to about 10,000 students around the country at any given time, who stand to benefit from music education through the learning of wind instruments. Most of these students will not graduate to enter a professional music program, but many will be deprived of the possibility and exposure. Many will agree that the training of musicianship needs to start early; professional development is not just about training practicing musicians, but also sowing the seeds for the future.

For those who are already studying to become a professional, or are already stakeholders in the industry, the challenges are consistent and real; tuition is expensive and the options for professional growth are indeed lacking.

So in 2013, I had the necessary international connections, but lacking of a convincing model, and so, the prize was initially born without the consideration of external sponsorship. It was one of those times where one feels the need for complete control of a project; too many cooks spoil the soup, as they say (a saying that I would eventually come to recognize as being inconsistent, especially from an administrative point of view). Luckily, I was later informed of the ABRSM International Sponsorship Fund, which provided the possibility of flexible funding, and so, the rest, as they say, is history.

The prize would also not be possible without the minds of some generous and incredibly talented people. Since 2015, the charismatic **Mr. Chong Keng Woon** has joined the team as coordinator for all education programmes of the prize in West Malaysia. At the same time, we have also have had the annual support of Kojereeds proprietor, **Mr. Yong How Keen**.

What is the Prize?

The commitments of our prize recipients are multifaceted. The first part includes presenting three solo recitals at the venue of their choice. They are required to work with us to form decisions on venues, co-presenters, budgets and feasibility. Our winners are encouraged to perform alongside the most distinguished of Malaysian musicians. This would not only benefit the musical growth of the winner but also establish his/her standing in the local circuit.



Above: Clockwise, acclaimed Malaysian pianist Kenneth Teh with former winners Kenny Lim, Ivy Fung, Alyssa Yam and Tan Chai Shuang (who is in picture with flutist Foo Chie Haur from the Malaysian NSO and ABRSM's current SEA Regional Consultant, Ryan Lewis).

In the spirit of networking and professional development, Alyssa's commitment in 2017 included a special performance, one that saw a collaboration with two other laureates of the prize (Kenny and Ivy), as well as pianist Kenneth Teh and NSO horn player Vyacheslav Kim to produce Beethoven's Quintet in Eb (which was produced in conjunction with the Yin Qi Sacred Music Festival 2017).



In 2015, we sent Kenny Lim to participate in the Silpakorn Summer Music School (SSMS) in Pattaya, Thailand. The SSMS is an intensive and prestigious orchestral and instrumental course which benefitted Kenny tremendously. We wanted our winners to build international relationships that would hopefully last a life time, and working with a regional partner proved to be useful.



Above: Teachers and students of the clarinet studio.
Left: The SSMS Orchestra.

The relationship with the Silpakorn University continued to flourish in 2016, when Ivy Fung was invited as a winner of the prize to perform together with faculty members of the music department in a concert tour of Penang (Ivy's hometown in Malaysia).



Above: Faculty members of the Silpakorn University who are also members of the Royal Bangkok Symphony Orchestra, together with 2016's winner, bassoonist Ivy Fung (middle).

In 2016, we decided to turn our focus inwards, and invested in a different form of training; one that involves music education.

Sowing the Seeds

From 2016, we adjusted our funding priorities, and placed greater emphasis on music education on a grassroots level. On top of performances, our winners are now required to present three workshops as commitments to winning the prize.



Above: Laureates from over the years, presenting workshops around the country. Students from Kuching, Kota Kinabalu, Kelantan, Penang, Melaka, Selangor, as well as other parts of the country have benefitted from such initiatives. Most of these students do not have access to specialist teachers, and were incredibly appreciative of our visits.

What's Next?

For 2019, the Malaysian Wind Music Prize will be open to **Ensembles**.

Malaysian Wind Music Prize 2019

Ensemble Edition

"The Prize has given me many fantastic opportunities to collaborate with local talents. It gave me an insight to what it takes to hold your own recitals - from the planning, budgeting, right down to the moment you step on stage, with people guiding and advising you every step of the way. Having the chance to travel across the country to hold workshops to encourage and share my experience with students was definitely the highlight of this prize!"

Japheth Law, Winner, 2018

The 6th edition of the Malaysian ABRSM Wind Music Prize is here! Audition for an opportunity to grow as a wind player and musician, developing the necessary skills to succeed in the Malaysian classical music scene. For the first time, the prize will be open to **ensembles**.

The aim of this prize is:

- To promote the tradition of concert recitals in Malaysia.
- To equip young professional Malaysian musicians with skills necessary for an enhanced and diverse career.
- To encourage the culture of playing wind instruments and inspire future musicians in Malaysia.
- To educate young aspiring musicians on the demands of Malaysia's challenging music scene.
- To create opportunities in expanding international contacts and developing careers.

The Prize:

A grant of **RM12000**, funded by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM), will go into the support and preparation of the winner's commitments.

Application guideline: bit.ly/malaysianwindmusicprize2019

International panel 2019:



Levin Chan *flute*
Hangzhou Philharmonic Orchestra



Supreei Assavananda Aorn
Royal Bangkok Symphony Orchestra



Wang Haiyu *tuba*
China NCPA Orchestra

Supported by:



Hosted by:



Laureates of the Malaysian Wind Music Prize

2014 – Tan Chai Suang, horn : member of the National Center of Performing Arts Orchestra, Beijing.

2015 – Kenny Lim, clarinet : masters student at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, UK.

2016 – Ivy Fung, bassoon : recent graduate at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, Singapore.

2017 – Alyssa Yam, oboe : current undergraduate student at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, Singapore.

2018 – Japheth Law, flute: current undergraduate student at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, UK.

2019 - ?

The possibilities are endless, and we hope you will join us in 2019!

Application guidelines: bit.ly/malaysianwindmusicprize2019

About Howard Ng

An annual grant recipient of the Associated Board of Royal Schools of Music (2014-2019) for the creation and administration of the Malaysian Wind Music Prize, oboist Howard Ng has performed for audiences on three continents. With the Malaysian Philharmonic and its Youth Orchestra, Howard has appeared as both a soloist and a chamber musician.

In Malaysia, Howard can regularly be heard at concerts of Ensemble Virama, where he is co-founder and artistic leader. He can also be regularly heard at concerts organised by Bachfest Malaysia around the country, where he serves as Principal Oboist.

From 2011-2013, Howard was Principal Oboist of the Malaysian National Symphony Orchestra, where he spearheaded the revival of the NSO Wind Ensemble. From 2015-2016, Howard served as a faculty member at the Silpakorn Summer Music School in Thailand. As an orchestral musician he has performed with every major ensemble in Malaysia and Singapore, the Asian Youth Orchestra, as well as with the Qatar Philharmonic and the Pro Musica Bangkok.

In Kuala Lumpur, Howard studied with Joost C. Flach & Yong How Keen at the UCSI University. He later studied with Rachel Walker and Carolyn Hollier at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music (NUS) in Singapore. Howard has also studied privately with Bart Schneemann, and with Jane Marvine at the Asian Youth Orchestra. He has performed in the masterclasses of Hansjörg Schellenberger, Thomas Indermühle, Elaine Douvas, Jonathan Kelly, John Anderson, Peter Veale, and others.

Since 2017, Howard has been working for Programming & Productions at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, a department that facilitates some 200 public facing events annually. In this capacity, Howard has supported the production of artists such as Les Arts Florissants, Sir András Schiff, Masaaki Suzuki, Paul Lewis, Igudesman & Joo, Juilliard Quartet, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet, Eric Hoeprich, Sophie Daneman, Hans Kipfer, Gabor Takács-Nagy and many others.

Malaysian Wind Music Prize: Comprehensive list of past events

Winner 2014 – Tan Chai Suang, horn

Guest musicians:

Wong Chee Yean, piano
Kenneth Teh, piano
Lee Chun Howe, oboe
Foo Chie Haur, flute

Workshops at:

July 2014: Chung Ling High School Penang and Bukit Mertajam
Aug 2014: Chong Hwa High School Band and Air Symphony Band at Dreamworld Music Center
Aug 2014: With students of SK St. Teresa at the International Music House, Kuching

Concerts:

15 Aug 2014: International Music House, Kuching.
21 Aug 2014: Bentley Music Academy, Kuala Lumpur.
30 Aug 2014: Komtar Auditorium, Penang.

Winner 2015 – Kenny Lim, clarinet

Guest musicians:

Bui Yik Ling, soprano
Kenneth Teh, piano

April 2015: Funded study at Silpakorn Summer School Thailand.

Workshops at :

Sep 2015: Kian Kok Middle School Kota Kinabalu
Sep 2015: SJK Chung Hwa Primary School Menggatal
Hinhua Middle School Klang
Pay Fong High School & Catholic High School, Melaka

Concerts:

10 Sep 2015: UCSI University Le Quadri Ballroom, Kuala Lumpur
20 Sep 2015: KK Music Festival, Shangri La's Rasa Ria, Kota Kinabalu
29 Sep 2015: JB Arts Festival, The Black Box, MAP Nusajaya, Johor

Winner 2016 – Ivy Fung, bassoon

Guest musicians:

DSCH String Quartet
Lee Chun Howe, oboe
Frederic Walienne, oboe
Kenneth Teh, piano
Bernard Tan, piano

Workshops:

June 2016: SMJK Chung Ling Georgetown, SMJK Chung Ling Butterworth, SMJK Jit Sin Bukit Mertajam,
SMS Raja Tun Azlan Shah Taiping
Sep 2016: Chong Hwa Independent School, Kuala Lumpur
Dec 2016: Workshop organized in conjunction with Malaysian Ministry of Education, Istana Budaya, Kuala Lumpur

Concerts:

15 May 2016: Concert with Silpakorn University Woodwind Ensemble, St. Jo's Chapel, Penang
17 July 2016: Lecture Recital at Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur
19 Dec 2016: Concert with DSCH Quartet, Lammannss Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur

Winner 2017 – Alyssa Yam, oboe

Guest musicians:

Teo Shao Ming, flute
Lee Chun Howe, oboe
Grace Tan See Von, oboe
Kenneth Teh, piano
Vyacheslav Kim, horn
Laureates of Malaysian Wind Music Prize

Workshops:

June 2017: SMJK Pay Fong and SMJK Catholic students at iNOTE Music Academy, Melaka
Dec 2017: Chung Ling High School

Concerts:

11 June 2017: iNOTE Music Academy, Melaka
8/9 July 2017: Yinqi Sacred Music Festival, The Playhaus
24 Dec 2017: Komtar Auditorium, Penang

Winner 2018 – Japheth Law, flute

Guest musicians:

Lee Chun Howe, oboe
Joshua Tang, oboe
Foo Chie Haur, flute
Wong Xue Fen, flute
Bonnie Kong, piano

Workshops:

24 May 2018: St. Joseph Private School, together with St. Teresa Alumni, Kuching
16 June 2018: St. Joseph Private School, Kuching
11 July 2018: SBP Machang, Kelantan
25 July 2018: SMK St. Mary, Kuala Lumpur
26 July 2018: SMK Pusat Bandar Puchong 1, Kuala Lumpur

Concerts:

26 May 2018: Chin Fu Methodist Church, Kuching
21 July 2018: The Star building, Penang
4 August 2018: UCSI University Recital Hall, Kuala Lumpur