

MGS HOME TO SIX GENERATIONS OF WOMAN'S FAMILY B10

EDUCATION



Above: Student Joyce Seah won in the solo singing category. Left: Jelita Jade Jaimon was in the team that won the online popularity award. PHOTOS: AZIZ HUSSIN FOR THE STRAITS TIMES



Mr Wayne Oh Geng Hui (left) and Mr Jeremy Hwang Jie Wei (right) bagged the prize for best composition with their song Unforgettable Past, which was performed by their friend Brandon Ling Zi Hao. All are 19 and pursuing diplomas in music and audio technology at Singapore Polytechnic. ST PHOTO: JAMIE KOH



Fion Chai Xin Yi and Liu Yifei from River Valley High won in the group singing category. PHOTO: DIOS VINCOY JR FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

Students reliving spirit of xinyao

More taking part in school programme that includes competition and workshops

Cheow Sue-Ann

It may be a Mandarin folk song movement that took off in the 1980s before they were even born, but that has not stopped a growing number of teenagers from reliving the xinyao spirit.

More are taking part in a school xinyao programme that includes a singing and songwriting competition, music appreciation sessions and songwriting workshops.

The number of students participating in the programme has been rising steadily since it was started in 2015. This year, some 10,000 students took part, double the number last year, said the Ministry of Education (MOE).

Xinyao has enjoyed a mini revival in the last few years, with concerts, a TV drama serial and a documentary featuring the Singaporean music movement.

Mr Goh Sin Teck, editor of Chinese-language daily Lianhe Zaobao, co-organiser of this year's national schools xinyao competition, said response to the event has grown stronger over the past three years.

"With more and more participants and more variety in the schools and students who participate, even the traditionally English-centric schools are also getting involved," he added.

Mr Cai Yiren, 52, a producer at TCR Music Station, which manages and produces concerts and events, including xinyao ones, said: "It is great to see xinyao coming back up. It is important to our local culture and heritage, and is a way for young people to understand and contribute to our history."

He added: "Much of xinyao lies in the spirit of composition - writing each Singaporean's own personal story."

Mr Goh feels that the local Mandarin music movement is rooted in the spirit of creation, and it is important to encourage people to "create the xinyao of their generation and pass it on".

Singapore Polytechnic (SP) student Wayne Oh Geng Hui, 19, one half of the team that won in the song composition category at the national xinyao competition on Aug 12, said: "The most fulfilling part of music for me is writing the song. The story and the melody need to communicate a message,

and it is important to me for that to be done well."

He and teammate Jeremy Hwang Jie Wei, 19, both final-year music and audio technology students, attended a xinyao masterclass out of interest and learnt to write a song.

Said Mr Hwang: "We learnt how to write a story in one line, to capture meaning beyond the literal."

Encouraged by their lecturers to give it a try, the duo decided to take part in the xinyao competition, roping in their classmate Brandon Ling Zi Hao, 19, to perform their song, Unforgettable Past, about a man looking back on a relationship.

Fellow SP student Joyce Seah, 18, won in the solo category. The food science and technology student injected her own style into xinyao singer Hong Shaoxuan's Farewell Sleeve, giving the song a modern, jazzy twist.

She said: "Getting into xinyao and Chinese songs made learning Chinese more fun. Previously, learning

Chinese was always about examinations and doing homework, but now that I sing and listen to Chinese music, the increased contact has made it more fun for me."

For Jelita Jade Jaimon, 17, an Indonesian Chinese student at Eunoia Junior College who was part of the team that won the online popularity award, the experience has led her to become more interested in Chinese music.

While it was hard to memorise the song lyrics, she not only did that but also found out their meaning.

An MOE spokesman said encouraging xinyao in schools could help motivate students to be interested in Chinese.

She said: "We hope to create a rich cultural environment in schools, to enable the young to not only enjoy the learning of Chinese language, but also express their creativity and reinforce their Singaporean identities through singing and composing xinyao songs."

Agreeing, Mr Goh said: "Xinyao is an effective way to engage children. It is a fun and beautiful way to enjoy the language and use it to talk about life and their experiences."

This year's xinyao competition has also shown that music can cross language barriers.

The winning duo in the group singing category, Fion Chai Xin Yi, 17 and Liu Yifei, 18, from River Valley High, had help from a teacher who does not understand Chinese.

They said they would not have won without the help of history and social studies teacher Christian Dela Cruz, who is of Filipino descent.

The 30-year-old said: "While it was a challenge because I could not sing the words and get them to repeat, we found ways around it. I hummed the song or played it on a keyboard, and the music allowed us to overcome the language barrier."

sueannc@sph.com.sg

ADDED BENEFIT

Getting into xinyao and Chinese songs made learning Chinese more fun.



JOYCE SEAH, winner of the solo category at this year's national schools xinyao contest.

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