



PROUD: (Above) Boston-based Shun Ng's being presented with the Holly Prize by Grammy-winner Peter Asher.

(Left) His music incorporates elements of rock, soul, funk and blues.

PHOTOS: FARHANA HOSSAIN, JAYNE TOOHEY

Shocked Star

S'pore-raised musician was surprised to be awarded prize by Songwriter's Hall of Fame in US

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After he made headlines for receiving high praise for his musical talent from legendary US music producer Quincy Jones in 2013, Singapore-raised Shun Ng has scored an even bigger accolade.

Ng, 26, was awarded the annual Holly Prize at this year's Songwriters Hall of Fame Induction Gala on June 9 in New York City.

The Holly Prize was created in 2009 as a tribute to the legacy of 1950s US musician Buddy Holly. It recognises breakthrough singer-songwriters. The prize is administered and judged by the Hall of Fame.

Ng, a fingerstyle guitarist-vocalist and US citizen, was born in Chicago and is based in Boston, but considers himself a Singaporean at heart after spending almost 20 years here.

He told The New Paper in a Skype interview yesterday: "It was a huge shock and so unexpected because it's not something anyone can get.

"I'm also honoured to have received it from three-time Grammy-winning (record producer) Peter Asher."

He added: "This award is definitely

my biggest achievement and highest honour so far in my music career."

When asked if he is aiming for a Grammy next, Ng – whose music incorporates elements of rock, soul, funk and blues – said: "The most important thing is to work hard at my craft and not do it just to win an award, but to do it because I love it."

He was more nervous about seeing his favourite artists rather than receiving the award at the ceremony.

STARS

He said: "There were tons of stars, many great writers and artists like Gamble and Huff, Valerie Simpson, Lionel Richie and Nile Rodgers whom I respect and admire.

"It was just so incredible to be in the same room and breathe the same air."

He's been endorsed by Jones, who said of Ng: "You won't believe your eyes nor your ears... I was simply blown away by both his soul and his science – his creativity and his uniqueness are astounding."

Guitarist Brian May from English rock band Queen also tweeted in December 2014 about Ng's cover of their song Bohemian Rhapsody: "You gotta see! Amazing new solo Acoustic & Vocal arrangement of Bo Rap. Check out



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– Shun Ng

those harmonics, guys!"

However, success didn't come easy for Ng while he was growing up.

When he was eight, he was diagnosed with dyslexia and struggled with schoolwork at Anglo-Chinese School (Barker Road and later International).

He said: "I was so detached with words, but music helped me. When I was struggling with school, I would go home and play my guitar and just disappear into the music to make myself feel better."

Ng started learning the instrument when he was 14, after his father bought him a nylon-string guitar for Christmas.

In 2012, after completing his studies in music and audio technology at Singapore Polytechnic and national service, he attended Berklee College of Music in Boston, US, on a scholarship.

But he dropped out after two semesters to pursue music full-time after he signed with Ralph Jaccodine Management.

He said: "Singapore will always be home to me. My whole upbringing was there, I started learning the guitar there and my family and friends are there."

He added: "During my shows, I talk

about Singapore and the fact that I'm Chinese and that I'm not trying to be white or black..."

"For one of the first shows I played in the US, I received feedback that I had no soul in the way I played..."

"Whether people want to categorise (my music) as 'Chinese blues' is not important to me.

LABELS

"I don't want to be labelled, but some people can never get past my race... (but) there are enough people in the world who can (accept) me for who I am."

His father, Dr John Ng, a 62-year-old leadership consultant, told TNP: "I am very grateful rather than proud that the industry has recognised his talent because what Shun has is a gift from God. It's not from me or my wife because we don't have a musical background."

Ng's parents have been "very supportive" of him – even when he dropped out of Berklee.

Said Dr Ng: "The dean told us that 50 per cent of the students don't complete their studies, instead they are scouted by agents. That was comforting to hear, to know that the students are as good as the industry standards."