

# Young composers get a boost

Workshop and concert is Singapore Symphony Orchestra's first such initiative in 10 years

**Akshita Nanda**  
Arts Correspondent

**T**he Singapore Symphony Orchestra is premiering the works of young local composers at a free concert at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music on Thursday.

Observers say it is the orchestra's first initiative in 10 years to encourage new compositions from Singapore and hope it will not be the last.

The SSO used to run a composer-in-residence scheme for local musicians, which ended with composer John Sharpley's term in 2004.

A New Music Forum featuring modern music from Singapore composers ran from the 1980s but ended in 2003.

Mr Anthony Brice, 38, who has been the SSO's general manager since 2010, declined to comment on past policies or to say whether this concert might become an annual event.

The programme this Thursday will be determined after a workshop today in which the orchestra plays eight entries received after an open call last October for unpublished orchestral works five to 10 minutes long, from Singaporean or Singapore-based composers who should be no older than 35 years on Feb 1.

"We thought we'd call for composers born after the SSO began," says Mr Brice.

The eight composers who wrote in range from teenage music students to 20somethings who are making a name in the local scene.

They include Terrence Wong, 25, whose concerto for trombone and wind symphony will be premiered by American trombone star Joseph Alessi on Feb 23 (see story below), and Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music student Phang Kok Jun, 25, composer-in-residence at local ensemble Ding Yi Music Company.

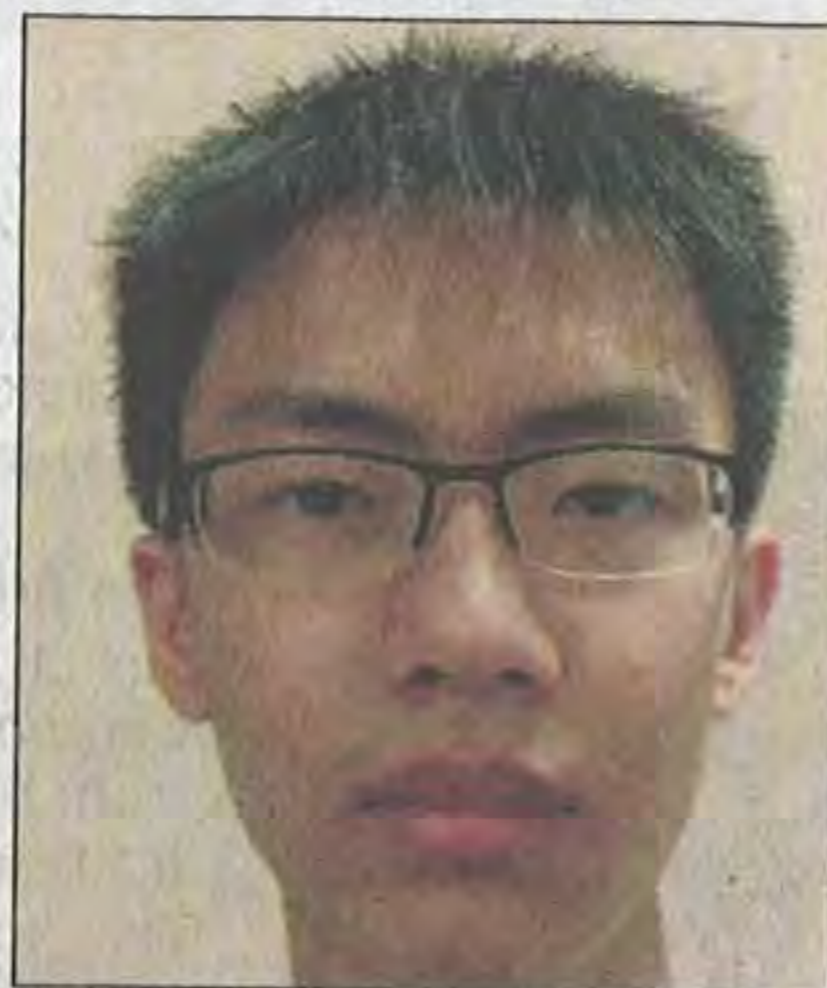
The other six are Yong Siew Toh Conservatory students Liew Kong Meng, 24, and Joshua Pangilinan, 25; Raffles Institution student Tan Tiag Yi, 17; School of the Arts student Koh Chen Jin, 18; Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts student Fam Hui Yuen, 20; and King's College student Gregory Gu Wei, 23.

Today's workshop, conducted by SSO assistant conductor Jason Lai, will help the composers hear and refine their work.

Lai, 39, who also conducts Thursday's concert, says the workshop is not a competition. "All eight works we received are very fine, very good," he adds.

Mr Brice adds: "It's not about artistic analysis of their work, but the process of writing for an orchestra - have they written tones too high for the trumpet, for example."

Both say the players in the orchestra will decide which works to play on Thursday, depending on how the works fit into the rest of the programme, which includes Profokiev's Piano Concerto No. 3, written when the composer was only 30.



The young composers are thrilled at the chance of hearing their work played. Younger musicians such as Tan and Koh say they have never written for orchestra before and are grateful for this chance to broaden their horizons.

And while Mr Phang has had several works performed in public by the Singapore Chinese Orchestra and Ding Yi Music Company, he says: "There aren't many opportunities around for young composers to write for a full orchestra and we have to cherish every opportunity to do so. Like every composition reading, this is a great opportunity to receive valuable feedback from the conductor and musicians to help me improve my orchestration and composition skills."

Other musicians and music observers Life! spoke to say that the SSO could offer Singapore composers more opportunities.

**Five of the eight composers at the workshop: (clockwise from top left) Tan Tiag Yi, 17, Joshua Pangilinan, 25, Phang Kok Jun, 25, Koh Chen Jin, 18, and Fam Hui Yuen, 20.**

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF PHANG KOK JUN, CHENG JIN KOH, FAM HUI YUEN, TIAG YI TAN, JOSHUA PANGILINAN



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## NEW GENERATIONS

**Where:** Conservatory Concert Hall  
**When:** Thursday, 7.30pm  
**Admission:** Free

Composer Zechariah Goh, 44, senior lecturer of composition at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts, encouraged his student Ms Fam to send in a piece for the workshop and hopes the orchestra will organise other similar events. "When I was a student, I looked up to this New Music Forum - it was something I could aspire to participate in. The younger generation should also have something to look forward to," he says.

Life!'s classical music reviewer Chang Tou Liang says that the orchestra co-commissions works from American composers such as Bright Sheng's new violin concerto last month, but hardly calls for new works from local composers. "The SSO has not done enough for Singapore composers," he says.

Mr Brice says the SSO most recently commissioned a guitar concerto from composer Bernard Tan, played at the SSO's 34th Anniversary Concert. "As the national orchestra, the SSO is committed to supporting local composers and performing Singaporean compositions," he adds.

"The SSO has always worked closely with Singaporean and Singapore-based composers, and the orchestra's many subscription and outreach programmes have featured compositions by Kelly Tang, Leong Yoon Pin, Bernard Tan and Ho Chee Kong, among others."

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