

SPEECH BY MR LAWRENCE WONG, MINISTER FOR CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND YOUTH, AT THE SCHOOL OF THE ARTS AWARDS DAY 2014, WEDNESDAY, 21 MAY 2014, 1.00PM AT THE SOTA CONCERT HALL

Mr Lee Tzu Yang,
Chairman, School of the Arts

Ms Lim Geok Cheng,
Principal, School of the Arts

Teachers and staff

Parents and students

Distinguished guests

1. Let me first congratulate our award recipients, and the student body that they represent. The graduating class has done very well indeed, achieving even better academic results than the last cohort. So well done to the principal, teachers and of course the students at SOTA!

Reaching for Artistic Excellence

2. I've done a stint at MOE and I've visited many schools and attended many graduation and award ceremonies. Of course, every school has its own strengths and niches of excellence, and it's hard to make comparisons. But I have to say that we have something

special and unique here in SOTA. It's a good example of how we are indeed opening up pathways for youths to realise their artistic potential as part of a quality and rigorous education.

3. Indeed the truly distinct edge of a SOTA education is the training and exposure it provides in the arts. It is here on this campus that many have made their first forays into new art forms, sharpened their early instincts and potential in the arts, and found the space for self-expression. It is here that creativity and new artistic connections flourish, sowing the seeds for our next generations of artists, art advocates and creative professionals.

4. SOTA has already nurtured excellence in many of our young artists, and enabled them to pursue their interest and talent in the arts, whether locally or overseas. Last year we celebrated the achievement of Michelle Lim, the first Singaporean accepted into The Juilliard School to pursue dance. From the class of 2012, we have Amni Musfirah who is now honing her craft at the Berklee College of Music.

5. The future appears similarly bright for this cohort of graduates. Some have secured placements in institutions such as the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music and the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts, even before the release of the IBDP results.

6. One example is Brenda Koh who was accepted into the Young Artist Programme at the Yong Siew Toh

Conservatory of Music when she was a Year 6 student, and is now continuing her studies there.

7. Several have also made their mark overseas, even before graduation. For example, Elizabeth Mae Morier's final year film project, *Moving In*, was selected to play at the 2013 Puebla International Film Festival in Mexico. I congratulate all our students on this success, and hope all their successes will inspire other budding artists in SOTA.

Launch of IBCC Programme

8. At MCCY, we want SOTA to continue to strengthen its focus on artistic excellence, and to create the environment for SOTA students to achieve their potential in a diverse range of artistic fields.

9. SOTA cannot just be a school with good programmes in the arts – there are already many MOE schools that serve such a purpose. SOTA has to be a specialised school where the arts takes centre stage, and where there is a strong and dedicated focus in nurturing artistic talents.

10. In particular, we recognise that in today's environment, achieving success as an arts practitioner requires more dedicated and full-time training. There are students who have demonstrated exceptional artistic ability and potential in their early years at SOTA, and who indicate a strong interest in pursuing a career in the arts. These students now only have the option of doing

the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP).

11. So I am glad to announce a new option for these students, in the form of SOTA's International Baccalaureate Career-related Certificate (IBCC) programme. The IBCC will provide a more flexible learning framework and environment, specially designed to nurture artist practitioners amongst students with exceptional artistic talent. It will provide students with a good pre-conservatory foundation during Year 5 and Year 6, where they will undergo specialised training to hone their artistic skills and prepare for admission into Arts Institutes and Conservatories, whether local or abroad.

12. I understand that many of these arts institutions have already indicated their support for the IBCC qualification. This includes the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music, NAFA and LASALLE. Abroad, institutions like the New England Conservatory in the United States, and the Rambert School of Ballet and Contemporary Dance in the United Kingdom, have also given their support.

13. So, the IBCC is off on a good start. It will provide an additional specialised pathway for those with the artistic talents to excel in a Conservatory setting. I am sure that we all look forward to great artistic achievements from the inaugural IBCC cohort.

Multiple Pathways for SOTA Graduates

14. Whether through the IBDP or the IBCC, there will be many pathways and varied career options that lie ahead for our SOTA students and graduates.

15. For instance, some of you may return to the fold as educators. I am glad to note Ms Chia Poh Hian as an example, a dance student who was awarded an NAC scholarship. She graduated with First Class Honours in Contemporary Dance at the London Contemporary Dance School (LCDS). Poh Hian recently returned to join SOTA's teaching faculty. We warmly welcome her back to Singapore and to SOTA, this time as a teacher.

16. Some may be an accomplished artist; or an artist instructor. Some may be an arts administrator; or a creative professional. Or life may take them further afield, to unexpected new terrains: where they may not work directly in the arts, but remain a lifelong patron and advocate.

17. Regardless of the path our students choose, I want to assure them today that if they work hard and are determined, you can succeed – and we will help them to do so. We do this because we believe in the importance of the arts, and the rewards of pursuing their dreams and convictions.

Close Partnership for a Culture of the Arts

18. When I say “we”, I refer to a partnership that spans the government and all segments of society. We are all

invested in creating the best possible environment for young Singaporeans to excel, and more broadly, for a Singapore society that values and appreciates the arts.

19. On MCCY's part, we are working hard to build up a vibrant arts and culture scene, with plenty of opportunities for our artists to thrive long after their graduation. We are upgrading our cultural institutions, which are key pillars of the arts ecosystem. Platforms like the upcoming Singapore International Festival of the Arts provide chances for artists to shine across a broad range of genres, including theatre, dance and music as well as the visual arts. In addition, we are doing more to profile our Singaporean talents overseas through a new Cultural Diplomacy fund that has just been set up. So there will be many opportunities ahead for our young artists to shine, both locally and abroad.

20. But the work that we do would not be possible without the tremendous contributions of our partners. First, our corporate and individual patrons: sponsors and donors who, in the SOTA context, have given generously through awards, scholarships and bursaries.

21. Second, our institutional partners. Earlier on, we saw some of SOTA's partners such as the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (NAFA), the LASALLE College of the Arts and the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music on stage. It is a pleasure to see such strong partnerships flourishing within our arts community, and with broader Singapore society. This bodes well for SOTA's integration into the arts ecosystem, and for the prospects of our SOTA graduates.

22. Third, the community – comprising tireless efforts from teachers, parents and more. Thank you for giving to our students' future, for guiding them in their journey, and believing in their potential. None of this would be possible without you.

23. And to our SOTA students, may I add that they too, are part of this community. I trust that the tremendous spirit and positive effort they have poured into the community will spill over into life beyond their graduation. As they move into the next phase of their journey, I am confident that they will thrive in their new roles, and help the community to flourish in return.

Concluding Remarks

24. Finally, it leaves me to congratulate all of our graduating students again on your achievements and hard work. As a cohort, you have demonstrated not only high academic ability, but also strong qualities of character and outstanding artistic excellence. I hope they will continue to aim high and persevere. The community around them is committed to helping them flourish. And I believe they will one day do likewise for the next generation. I am excited about what all of our SOTA students can achieve in the years to come, and wish them every success in their endeavours.