

# Finding harmony through arts



**Music, dance and other art forms present fun ways to learn about different cultures and promote interracial and interreligious harmony.**

**A**s a cosmopolitan city, Singapore is home to many different colourful cultures. This rainbow of cultures was exactly what the Colourful Heritage event at Fort Canning Park aimed to show off.

Held over the weekend on 6 and 7 September, the event featured cultural performances and art-and-craft displays put up by various ethnic communities. Some of the highlights included a fashion show of traditional sarees by the Parsi Zoroastrian Association and a Malay wedding demonstration. The participants represented cultures from almost every corner of the globe – the Middle East, Portugal, Korea, Peru and India.

The visitors were not the only ones who got to go on a cultural journey of the world. The participating groups themselves went around visiting each other's displays. "It was a nice little way for them to get to know more about the culture of other communities," said Annie Chan, the Events Director of Red Box Events, which helped put up the Colourful Heritage event together with the National Parks Board.

There was also a sense of togetherness when the participants gathered around the stage during performances to cheer each other

on, regardless of which group the performers belonged to. "The atmosphere was just wonderful," said Ms Chan. "You could really see how arts – something everyone can relate to – bonds people together."

## Cultures meet

Arts present opportunities to explore different cultures and experience them firsthand.

The Dance Club at Fernvale Primary School, made up of 27 Chinese girls, drew inspiration from the Indian dance style, Bharathanatyam, and Western forms such as Ballet. The result was a unique, award-winning performance. It also showed dance can be a way for people to learn about the cultures of others.

Fernvale Primary's dance item was selected to join the line-up of colourful performances at this year's Interracial Interreligious (IRIR) Harmony Nite.

The IRIR Harmony Nite (above) is held annually to celebrate and strengthen interracial and interreligious harmony. The event was held in July by the Thye Hua Kwan Moral Society (THKMS), together with four self-help groups, the Inter-Religious Organisation (IRO) and two moral promotion societies.

The performances included a group of Burmese, Chinese, Indian and Malay singers who overcame language barriers to perform a Mandarin song about cultural diversity. Dancers from Sengkang

Primary School displayed their originality with an item that featured Chinese, Indian, Malay and modern dance styles and costumes. They were selected from the IRIR Harmony Music and Dance Competition held a few weeks earlier.

For the competition, students from pre-school level to ITEs and JCs were invited to prepare a music or dance item or a skit showcasing interracial harmony. "We chose music and dance as a means to send out the message because it's something that is fun and enjoyable," said Lee Kim Siang, chairman of the THKMS. "When students play and perform together, they get to bond, regardless of race or religion."

## Say it with music

Two years ago, well-known

jazz musician Jeremy Monteiro recommended music as a way to draw people together. "Music is very powerful, very bonding," he said. The idea was raised at the first Community Engagement Programme (CEP) Workshop, held in 2006. The CEP is a network of people from different communities in Singapore aimed at building trust between the different ethnic groups in Singapore.

Two years later, Prof Monteiro's suggestion has taken shape. A theme song for the CEP made its debut in May. The ballad, "Singapore United", was created by the Singapore Police Force Band. The hope is that music will help unite people of different races and religions. Said composer Inspector Sulaiman Bin Abdul Wahab about the song: "I had a vision of creating it as a national song that can be easily sung by people."

With its soft tune, "Singapore United" is catchy and simple enough to sing along to. "The song has captivated listeners with its melody. But more importantly, it engages listeners on the importance of being united," said Inspector Sulaiman.

Mr Audi Hariz Bin Sarman, one of the singers, agrees that the song can help spread the message to people of all backgrounds: "Music is universal; everyone can relate to it. With music, there are no communication barriers."

– "Singapore United" is available for listening at [www.singaporeunited.sg](http://www.singaporeunited.sg). This series is supported by the Community Engagement Programme (CEP) and the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS).



**Colourful Heritage** event participants from different cultures having fun. Top: Interracial Interreligious Music and Dance competition performance.