

SINGAPORE TATLER

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Talk of the town

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PHOTOGRAPHY: JENSON LEE;
ART DIRECTION: JANA TAN

A Heart for the Arts

*Kris Foundation director **Kris Tan** is one of a growing number of philanthropists committed to the long-term nurturing of young talent in the arts sector. Along with other dedicated donors and industry veterans, she tells **Grace Ma** what sustainable arts giving entails*

A COMMITMENT TO GROW the arts sector can only be fuelled by a personal passion. Kris Tan loved music so much growing up that she not only encouraged her two sons and daughter to be music lovers and accomplished musicians like herself, the director of Kris Foundation has also actively supported the local classical music scene through her foundation, and as a member of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO) Ladies' League.

Set up in 2011, the Kris Foundation's mission is to provide young classical musicians with opportunities to develop their skills, expand their knowledge and enrich their potential talent. It organises a few concerts a year to showcase promising young musicians, highlight lesser-known instruments such as the viola, and give musicians experience in solo public performances. At a recent concert in December last year, students from the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts not only performed classic pieces by Austrian composer Franz Schubert, but also two musical compositions titled *Sommerlied* and *Flower Visages* by Tan's 24-year-old daughter, Lim Kang Ning.

"I think Singapore needs to have a lot more of our own music compositions; pieces that can be recognisable as Singaporean," says Tan. "I'm always thinking of how I'm going to help the younger generation, such as providing a conducive space for practice and performance, opportunities for both performance and self-expression, and also resources to do research. I also hope to build up a strong library of music research by perhaps extending an arts residency to young musicians as well as composers."



"To support art is not just to support a production for immediate return in investment, but an investment for our future that will serve to embrace and acknowledge the tenacious spirit of human existence"

Besides financial support, Tan has also contributed time and effort to the education and mentorship of up-and-coming arts practitioners. She represents a growing group of arts philanthropists, which include society couple Christopher and Rosy Ho, who have consistently donated and helped to raise funds for SSO and the Singapore Symphony Children's Choir. At the National Arts Council's (NAC) Patron of the Arts Awards ceremony last July, Tan, as well as



PASSION FOR MUSIC

Kris Foundation director Kris Tan has organised concerts and music mentorships for promising young musicians since 2012. She is also a member of the Singapore Symphony Orchestra Ladies' League, which organises an annual fundraiser for SSO

the Hos, was among a total of 118 organisations and 186 individuals who were awarded for their support of the arts in 2016. Individual contributions in 2016 more than doubled to \$19.4m from \$8.2m in the previous year, and for the first time in the awards history, donors who made in-kind contributions in the form of artworks were recognised.

Charlotte Koh, deputy director of NAC's arts and culture development office, says, "Whether

financially, in-kind through organisational or professional expertise, or even through donating or loaning art works for the general public to appreciate, these are all important forms of support that help our artists create distinctive arts which add to the national canon and put Singapore on the global stage."

T.H.E Dance Company manager Jael Chew agrees, "The cost saving element that in-kind sponsorship provides is often not



highlighted, but it's critical to non-profit arts companies. Costs such as venue hire, manpower, equipment and accommodation associated with invitations to perform locally and overseas are covered by organisers and represent costs that we don't have to incur."

She adds that corporate sponsors such as M1 have also been instrumental in supporting the running and growth of T.H.E Dance Company's artistic initiatives, programmes and platforms such as the eight-year-old M1 Contact Contemporary Dance Festival, which champions learning, creation and collaboration through curated performances, workshops and technique classes. The local telco is also behind the long-running M1 Singapore Fringe Festival, which is into its 14th edition and also the title sponsor of the M1 Peer Pleasure Youth Theatre Festival, which features productions by Singapore youth under the guidance of professional theatre practitioners.

A NATION'S SOUL

Swiss private bank EFG Bank has supported its global brand ambassador, local jazz veteran Jeremy Monteiro, for the past decade, by sponsoring his concerts across the region in countries such as Hong Kong, Thailand, Taiwan and China. The EFG Bank

Spotlight series in March 2016 brought international jazz luminaries such as Italian organist Alberto Marsico and Danish saxophonist Jakob Dinesen together with local talents such as drummer Soh Wen Ming and bassist Ben Poh on the same stage.

"It's easy to find donations to the needy, but I think we need to see the arts and music as important too; they are the soul of a nation," says Albert Chiu, EFG Bank's chief executive for Asia-Pacific. "As a young 22-year-old private bank, we believe in investing in the youth for music and spotting talent when they are very young."

United Overseas Bank's (UOB) long-running annual Painting of the Year competition has also unearthed talented artists in Singapore and the Southeast Asian region for the past 36 years, and provided a platform for winners such as pioneer abstract artist Anthony Poon and contemporary Chinese ink painter Chua Ek Kay to be propelled to the global stage after their respective 1983 and 1991 accolades.

SERIOUS COMMITMENT

Corporations such as M1 and EFG Bank have shown their dedication to growing the arts scene by consistently supporting events such as (clockwise from above) the M1 Contact Contemporary Dance Festival, the EFG London Jazz Festival, and the M1 Singapore Fringe Festival, as well as artistes such as jazz musician Jeremy Monteiro (opposite) for as long as 14 years and counting

IMAGES: EMILIE HOLBA (EFG LONDON JAZZ FESTIVAL), JEREMY MONTEIRO, BERNIE NG (M1 CONTACT CONTEMPORARY DANCE FESTIVAL) AND RYAN PETERS PHOTOGRAPHY (M1 SINGAPORE FRINGE FESTIVAL)



Like a painting in progress, smaller individual strokes are slowly but surely appearing alongside bold brushes by corporations such as UOB, EFG Bank and M1 in the arts philanthropic landscape.

Koh notes that there has been a general upward trend of giving to the arts in the past five years, from \$35.3m in donations in 2012 to \$64.8m in 2016. This is likely due to initiatives such as the introduction of the Cultural Matching Fund in 2013, where the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth provides dollar-for-dollar matching grants for private cash donations to eligible arts and heritage

charities and Institutions of Public Character (IPC); generous tax deductions for donations in 2015; and the establishment of new arts institutions such as the National Gallery Singapore.

But there is a need for donors to see the arts as an essential thread in any society's fabric, and not a luxury strand to be considered only when it can be afforded, says

theatre company Drama Box artistic director Kok Heng Leun, who is also a nominated member of parliament representing the arts sector. He says, "To support art is not just to support a production for immediate return in investment, but an investment for our future that will serve to embrace and acknowledge the tenacious spirit of human existence.

"It is also important for corporations and individuals to see themselves as advocates. Good arts philanthropy is one with a great vision of not just building a recognition for now, but a promise of further engagement for the future."

In a fitting example, Chiu is also the founding chairman of the Jazz Association Singapore (JASS). Founded in September 2016, together with Monteiro and other partners, JASS organised the inaugural Lion City Youth Jazz Festival in May 2017, where young musicians learned from international jazz legends in bandstand style and were immersed in a professional environment. Public jazz workshops were also conducted.

Despite its current non-IPC status, which means that donations are not tax deductible, JASS recently raised \$400,000 at a fundraising gala, a figure that Chiu finds encouraging and indicative of a society that is maturing to appreciate the arts beyond receiving tax benefits. He explains, "In countries such as the UK and the US, which have a longer history of accumulating wealth, we see that corporations and individuals are more willing to give to the arts. The more economically developed a country becomes, the artistic areas become stronger as more people appreciate art and music. With Singapore's progress, I hope that what we do through JASS can promote jazz in Singapore."

Tan agrees that it is time that the private sector steps up to be more involved in cultivating the arts sector. "Individuals like us need to plant the seeds and keep the good work going. I love my country and while I know that we're still in the process of finding our identity, we can't wait too long for it to happen. I want to be a part of the creation of the 'Singapore Sound'".

