

Publication: Bras Basah Bugis
Date: 1 September 2017
Headline: SMU arts festival 2017

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By Bras Basah Bugis on Sep 2017

Are the arts really useful? What do you make of it?

These are questions the Singapore Management University (SMU) Arts Festival hopes to tackle for members of the public this year, said Tessa Lim, 21, chairperson of the student organisation committee.

This is the third-year student's second time working on the festival – she had previously been with the public relations committee for the 2016 edition, where she liaised with potential sponsors.

The SMU Arts Festival, now in its third instalment, is an annual celebration of creativity and the arts involving 23 student clubs from SMU's Arts and Cultural Fraternity. With so many different clubs that cater to different disciplines, this 10-day festival also serves as a common platform for all of them to come together to showcase their talents and crafts.

Sometimes, this can be in the form of collaborations, which are very much encouraged. An example would be Progression: Notes to Nodes, a first joint performance by the SMU Chinese Orchestra (SMUCO) and SMU Symphonia for the festival, which seeks to depict the making of paper in three movements: Papyrus, The Mill, and Steam – Electricity – Beyond.

It's not a random concept, but one that's perfectly in line with this year's festival theme Pages, which serves to explore and challenge the audience's notion of education (especially with the digital age revolutionising traditional textbooks), literature and stories, causes (are we true champions of our beliefs, or blind followers of ideals, or both?) and paper as a medium.

Commenting on Pages, Lim said that the student organisation committee was in agreement with the theme because "it's very accessible to the clubs". Acknowledging that the SMU Arts Festival is driven by the student clubs' productions and events as they make up the festival programming, Pages was "general enough" for the clubs to relate to.

With many new developments in the campus' landscape, including the newly renovated Campus Green, the opening of the School of Law building, and the rebranded lyf@SMU, the theme of Pages also seeks to highlight this turning chapter in SMU's history.

Aside from the performances though, Lim feels that the event is a good way to provide a holistic education for the students as well. She said: "We want to create this artistic and culturally vibrant environment in SMU because as a university, students still have academic commitments. I think it's very important for us to pursue other hobbies and interests besides our academic commitments."

For Lim, specifically, her experience with organising the SMU Arts Festival is a chance for her to "see how things work behind the scenes, and what it takes to make a dance or theatre production."

As she runs around the festival helping out with the various productions and portfolios, watching her hard work come to fruition, Lim has one important goal she hopes to achieve at the end of it.

"We want the campus to be buzzing, with students who are eager to watch the productions. This year, with all our marketing efforts, we hope that more students and members of the public will come and they will know of the SMU Arts Festival, and look forward to next year's edition."

SMU Arts Festival runs from Sept 8 - 17, and is open to public. To learn more and to check out the full list of programmes, head over to their website.

Author: Bras Basah Bugis
Last Modified: 01 Sep 2017