



The Purple Symphony, which comprises a Chinese orchestra, strings, Chinese winds, percussion and singers, performing its set of five songs to an enthralled audience of 150 at the Singapore Conference Hall yesterday. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

Inclusive orchestra makes its debut

83-strong unit includes 67 with special needs such as autism and intellectual disabilities

Kok Xing Hui

Singaporeans with and without special needs have come together to form an orchestra with five musical sections.

Billed as the country's first inclusive orchestra, the Purple Symphony has 83 members aged four to 58.

It includes a Chinese orchestra, strings, Chinese winds, percussion and singers.

The orchestra made its debut yesterday, playing five songs to an enthralled audience of 150 at the Singapore Conference Hall.

Sixty-seven of the orchestra members have special needs ranging from autism to intellectual disa-

bilities and visual or hearing impairment. The Purple Symphony was set up by the Central Singapore Community Development Council (CDC) to promote inclusion through music.

Ms Denise Phua, Mayor of the Central Singapore CDC, said the orchestra is a way of celebrating abilities and not just highlighting what people cannot do.

"The orchestra plays together as a Singapore family – regardless of race, language, religion, abilities, background and so on," she said.

This orchestra follows recent moves to better integrate people with special needs with the rest of society. Singapore built its first inclusive playground in 2013 where chil-

dren with disabilities can play with those without. Yesterday, beneficiaries from Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (Minds) and Pathlight school students played drums while Lighthouse School's 17-member choir sang You Raise Me Up. Members of the Singapore Management University's Chinese orchestra are also part of the Purple Symphony, together with eight professional musicians from Ding Yi Music Company.

Pathlight student Aloysius Wong, 16, who performed a drum solo, said: "I was very nervous having to play in front of everyone, but I felt satisfied with my performance."

The orchestra's next performances will be at October's Purple Parade – an annual event celebrating those with special needs – and the Asean Para Games in December.

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