

HSBC Youth Excellence Award hits high note for Kevin

12-year-old receives \$200,000 to attend prestigious music school

BY MAGDALEN NG

WHEN classical guitarist Kevin Loh, 12, was accepted to The Yehudi Menuhin School, a prestigious music school in Britain, his parents were overjoyed. But they also wondered how they would pay for the six-year course.

"We were looking for ways to help us with the fees, and seeking funding through public or private institutions," his father, Mr Marcus Loh, 42, an IT professional, said. He and his wife, Maria, 42, a housewife, have two other children, Jon, five and Abby, two.

But they have less to worry about now because Kevin is this year's recipient of

the HSBC Youth Excellence Award for Musical Excellence.

It comes with a prize of \$200,000, which the National Arts Council will hold in trust for him. The money will go towards paying for his studies, which will cost about £40,000 (\$\$82,900) a year, as well as cover his expenses at international guitar competitions and master classes.

The award was presented by President S R Nathan last night at a ceremony in the University Cultural Centre at the National University of Singapore.

Business management undergraduate Oliver Loke, 23, received the award for Leadership Excellence and Community Service.

This is the 10th year of the HSBC Youth Excellence awards.

At the event, a cheque for \$112,570 was also presented to The Business Times Budding Artists Fund and The Straits Times School Pocket Money Fund. The money was raised by last year's recipient



Classical guitarist Kevin Loh (left), 12, is the recipient of the 2010 HSBC Youth Excellence Award for Musical Excellence, while Mr Oliver Loke (above), 23, received the award for Leadership Excellence and Community Service for his work with the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) youth movement.

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for musical excellence, the Orchestra Of The Music Makers, a volunteer youth orchestra.

"This award aims to support all the young talents to do what they do best, and hopefully, they will produce results to help the community," said Mr Goh Kong Aik, head of group communications and corporate sustainability at HSBC.

He added: "We give our youth a chance and the opportunity, and it's up to them to live up to their potential and deliver."

Past award recipients, including pianist Abigail Sin and violinist Gabriel Ng, have collectively helped to raise more than \$1 million for charity.

Kevin, a shy, bespectacled pupil at St Joseph's Institution Junior, is the sixth classical guitar student that The Yehudi Menuhin School has accepted, and the first one from outside Europe.

The school chanced upon a YouTube video his father had uploaded of him playing the guitar and asked if he would like to audition.

Kevin hopes to become a professional concert guitarist. "I am very happy for people to hear my music, especially so when I share my music for charity," he said.

He has performed at concerts such as ChildAid, an annual children's charity concert by The Straits Times and The Business Times, and also played for President Nathan at a charity golf tournament in 2007. Recently, he performed at the Youth Olympic Games Closing Ceremony, and hopes to move on to bigger platforms in the future.

"I'm only 12, and the future will definitely be uncertain, but no dream is too big or too small," he said.

Mr Loke, a third-year student at Singapore Management University, is the first Singaporean to be elected to the executive committee of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) youth movement, which has about 45 million young members in 130 countries.

He is also involved with University YMCA, the chapter established at universities, which focuses on local community service, international service programmes and social enterprise. It runs a cafe on the rooftop of the YMCA building in Orchard Road on Friday nights, which raises funds for its various programmes.

As a recipient of the Leadership Excellence and Community Service award, Mr Loke will be able to tap on \$100,000 in funding which HSBC is giving the National Youth Achievement Award (NYAA) Council. This funding will be for Mr Loke and young people on the NYAA scheme to use in creating both local and overseas youth developmental initiatives.

Mr Loke is also receiving an individual \$10,000 grant, which he can use to fund a community initiative he must personally lead. He hopes to use the money to develop youth leadership in countries such as Vietnam, East Timor and Nepal.

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