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SPEECH BY MR PETER CHEN, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR EDUCATION AT THE CONCERT
"HARMONICA FANTASY" BY YASUO WATANI ON 24TH JUNE 1999, 8.00PM AT TOUCH COMMUNITY
THEATRE

Good evening

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to be here for an evening of harmonica fantasy by Mr Yasuo
Watani. I am sure everyone present here this evening can appreciate beautiful
music, and I believe there are many who are also well-versed and knowledgeable about
the harmonica. In the hands of a maestro, this small and seemingly simple
instrument can resonate with full-bodied timbre or delight with bright and clear
tones. Whatever the level of proficiency or familiarity with the harmonica, we can
all enjoy and appreciate its unique quality of music. As Shakespeare once wrote,
"If music be the food of love, play on". Indeed, an opportunity such as this is to
be relished.

2. The harmonica, being small and compact, is one of the most portable musical
instruments and it has been a constant companion of many a traveller. Over the
years, the harmonica has traversed many great oceans and diverse terrain. It has
been brought to the North and South poles, down the Amazon and up to the summit of
Mount Everest. In fact, I have been informed that in 1965, astronaut Wally Schirra,
during the Gemini VI flight to outer space, had played on the tiny 4-hole Hohner
Little Lady.

3. It is also interesting to know that the harmonica is, in fact, a hybrid of both the East and West. It was invented in the East and developed in the West. It gained widespread popularity when Matthias Hohner, the German clockmaker turned to manufacturing harmonica and introduced it to North America in the 1860s. The cross-cultural element and worldwide appeal of the harmonica are prevalent even today, as evident at the World Harmonica Festival Competition which attracts participants from both the eastern and western countries who converge every four years.

4. An expressive and versatile instrument, the harmonica is popular in many countries. In Japan and in some cities in Germany, the instrument is used in the schools' music education. In Trossingen, Germany, the harmonica is offered as an instrument for serious study at the Hohner Konservatorium Trossingen. I am pleased to know that in Singapore, harmonica groups have continued to flourish in a number of schools as a form of extra-curricular activity. I believe the interest in this versatile and expressive instrument will continue to grow, and it will gain widespread popularity as more people get acquainted with it.

5. This evening's Concert by Mr Watani is indeed a rare treat for the Singapore audience. And what better way to spend a delightful evening than to let your imagination take flight and to immerse in the music of one of the world's leading chromatic harmonica soloists, as he interprets the technically-demanding solo pieces, as well as the virtuosic concerto piece, Toledo.

6. It is my hope that through concerts such as this, our appreciation of the beauty and versatility of harmonica music can be further enhanced.

7. I would like to wish you all an inspiring and enjoyable evening.

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