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SPEECH BY DR. LEE CHIAW MENG, MINISTER OF STATE
FOR EDUCATION, AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF
BEETHOVEN'S BI-CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS, AT THE
VICTORIA MEMORIAL HALL, ON 25TH OCTOBER, 1970,
AT 7.30 P.M.

We are gathered here to pay tribute to the genius of a man whose music has become an universal heritage. The name of Beethoven has already stood for everything that is inspiring and enduring in the realm of music.

Beethoven lived in an age of patronage, where the pursuit of music was perhaps a luxury. Today, however, the study of music is considered imperative in order to fulfil the need to develop aesthetic judgement. Music not only ministers to the recreational needs of man's nature, but, along with the visual arts, is essential for self-development and self-realisation. No education can be regarded as complete without attention being paid to the cultivation of aesthetic values.

Over the last few years no effort has been spared to provide a healthy aesthetic programme for our children but desirable results can be achieved only if parallel efforts are made by interested bodies in the private sector to promote cultural opportunities for school children. Musical experiences in school are limited to the Youth Festival, concerts and other such activities organised by schools, which though laudable, fall far below standards achieved in the professional field.

With Singapore's long history as a trading port and her immigrant society which is highly achievement-orientated, it is not surprising that our cultural promotion lags well behind our economic development. In fact, most impressaries consider cultural promotion as a purely economic enterprise without sparing a thought for the school children. As a result one often sees very few students at a concert while half the hall is empty, because the charges for such performances are generally beyond the means of the average student. I consider this a short-sighted policy even from the business point of view.

If we wish to cultivate the aesthetic value and build up a concert-going public, we have to begin with the students. They should be granted the privilege to enjoy the benefit from visiting artistes.

With a big student population such as ours is, I would consider any investment made in this area a viable proposition.

It was with this in mind that I made a proposition to the officials of my Ministry and the National Theatre Trust at a meeting in June, that they should consider a scheme for student membership of the Trust. The student members, by paying a nominal annual subscription, would be able to enjoy the privilege of attending any performance, whether local or visiting, at a nominal charge for some of the choice seats. I am fully aware that such a scheme cannot be economically viable in the short run. Nevertheless, it has the full-hearted support of the Trust Chairman and I recall that it was announced that such a scheme would be launched. The Young Musician Society, with its entire membership deriving from the teaching profession, is perhaps in the best position to assist and co-operate with the National Theatre Trust to launch such a scheme.

In fact, this scheme may even solicit the patronage of other organisations for similar privilege. After all, concession with respect to entertainment tax, has been given for visiting cultural performances. I would not think it is unreasonable to expect that certain concession in return be given to the student. My Ministry will co-operate with any interested body in projects or scheme which will ultimately benefit our students.

The varied events that will be featured in the celebrations are the results of such close co-operation. In this connection, I would like to thank the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Singapore for all its efforts in the realisation of these events. Suffice it to say that without their kind help and co-operation, the Beethoven Bicentenary Celebrations would not have been possible. Finally I would like to thank the German Charge d'Affairs for the generous gift of the complete set of records of Beethoven's works. I hope many of us here to-night will be inspired to put in greater effort for the cultural promotion in Singapore.

It now gives me great pleasure to declare the Beethoven Bicentenary Celebrations officially opened.