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SPEECH BY DR ALINE WONG, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR EDUCATION, FOR THE OPENING OF THE 3RD CHORAL CONVENTION ON TUESDAY, 21 NOV 2000, AT 9.30 AM, AT NOVOTEL APOLLO HOTEL (HAVELOCK ROAD)

1. The development of culture and the arts is an integral part of the vision of Renaissance Singapore. The Renaissance City report listed six key strategies for the development of the arts. The very first is to develop a strong arts and cultural base.

2. One of the ways in which MOE is striving to improve the quality of arts education in our schools is through the support and encouragement given to the development of CCA music programmes. An area of considerable development is the choral movement. In recent years many schools have set up their own choirs and judging from the results of the annual SYF Central Judging, choral standards have been rising rapidly.

3. Current statistics show that 60,400 pupils participate in some form of music-related CCAs, of which 15,300 are in the choir. This represents 25.4% share of music participation. At present 167 primary schools and 138 secondary

schools/junior colleges have their own choirs. This means that some 87% of our schools have a choir. This is a relatively high figure considering that schools have the option to prioritize and introduce CCAs according to their needs and resources.

4. The implementation of the Choral Excellence Programme has also provided the impetus and stimulus to encourage our schools to sustain their level of commitment and to maintain their choral standards. The main objective for the introduction of the programme is to promote a high level of excellence in choral singing. To be selected for the scheme the choir should distinguish itself with a good track record of outstanding choral achievements. Since the inception of the Programme in 1988, the number of schools on the Programme has grown to 14 (8 secondary and 6 JCs).

5. A special feature of the programme is the encouragement given to schools to explore and sing the rich repertoire of music in our region. To promote this aim, local composers have been commissioned to write and feature their music for our schools in the annual SYF competitions and presentations.

6. A good number of our school choirs in the programme have also achieved world standards by participating in international choral competitions and festivals, and bringing honours to their schools by winning awards and commendations. I would like to mention some of these choirs for having won international recognition for outstanding performances over the last few years. These include:

- a) Victoria Junior College Choir (The choir recently participated in the Choir Olympics 2000 in Linz, Austria and was honoured with Gold Medals for 2 categories – the ‘Folklore A Cappella’ & ‘Open Mixed Chorus’ Category);
- b) Temasek Junior College Choir (It achieved a Gold Award at the 15th Annual Pacific Basin Music Festival held in Honolulu this year);
- c) Anglo-Chinese Junior College Choir (It received the Grand Prix Prize at the Tampere International Choir Festival, held in Sweden 1999);
- d) Tampines Junior College Choir (It was awarded a Gold Diploma at the 3rd Pohlhelm International Choral Festival, in Germany in 1998);
- e) Anglican High School Choir (It clinched the Gold Medal at the 2nd

Annual San Francisco International Music Festival in 1996); and

- f) Anglo-Chinese Independent School Choir (It was judged the “Most Promising Choir” at the Pacific Basin Choral Festival in 1989 and in 1999, the Anglo-Chinese Madrigal Choir received a Silver Award at the same Festival).

7. The Choral Excellence Programme is also being extended to the primary schools. For a start we have identified 12 primary schools which have commendable choral track records and some of these schools, e.g. Tampines Primary School and Nanyang Primary School, have already made considerable progress in their choral development.

8. As part of the School Excellence Framework, schools are recognised for their all-round achievements beyond academic excellence through the Sustained Achievement Awards (SAA) scheme which was implemented in 1999. This award gives recognition to schools which have consistently achieved a high standard of performance in the various non-academic areas. The SAA (Arts) award is given to schools which have achieved outstanding results in at least two cultural areas at the primary level, or three areas at the secondary and JC/CI level. I am pleased to note that two schools in the Choral Excellence Programme have achieved the SAA (Arts) with consistent performance and support from its choral programme for two straight years, in 1999 and 2000. They are River Valley High School and National Junior College.

9. Teachers play a key role in sustaining the momentum and growth of the choral movement. A significant step which we are taking is to provide for upgrading of knowledge and skills of teachers through on-going in-service training programmes. I note that the CCA Branch has been moving in this direction by continually providing for such training through choral workshops and masterclasses and by organising a Convention such as today’s every three to four years. It has invited both local and international choral experts to acquaint our teachers with effective teaching strategies and to help them keep abreast with global choral trends. At the community level, our CCA Branch has also worked very closely with such educational and cultural bodies as the National Arts Council to promote arts education.

10. We have a potential to become a vibrant international arts hub. Apart from the obvious psychosocial benefits that fulfilment of their artistic talents will bring to our young, the economic impact which the arts will make will also become

evident and significant. What is needed is a shift in our thinking at all levels, especially amongst parents with regard to the intrinsic value and the economic prospect of arts education.

11. I am pleased to note the developments we have made so far. Our efforts are in line with our overarching vision of developing “*Thinking Schools and Learning Nation (TSLN)*”, and in providing a holistic education through the development of our pupils’ aesthetic talents.

12. I wish to welcome and thank all our choral clinicians for their esteemed presence and to wish all participants many fruitful and enjoyable hours of music-making.

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