

Hitting the high note

UCSI has set the tone for its long established music faculty by allowing it to operate as an independent unit.

By KANG SOON CHEN

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IN THE style of languid prose, the blended harmony of string music with the piano tinkling in the background conjures a leisurely pace of a quiet afternoon in the country.

At times folksy, the opening *andante* (slow) movement of Franz Joseph Haydn's *Piano Trio no. 39 in G major* had elements of the Classical era.

Played to perfection by the Orfeo Trio comprising cellist Leonid Shukaev, violinist Evgeny Zvonnikov and pianist Julie Bees at the Le Quadri Ballroom of UCSI University, the composition crescendoed like a train picking up pace before ending with a bang at its climax.

The acclaimed trio from the Wichita State University College of Fine Arts, School of Music in the United States, also performed compositions by Ludwig van Beethoven and Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich, in homage to Shukaev and Zvonnikov's Russian heritage.

Their presentation was held in conjunction with the silver jubilee celebrations of UCSI's School of Music which has now been given autonomy and is called the Institute of Music.

Considered the nation's premier music school in both the classical and contemporary fields, the institute will now be able to chart its own academic direction.

Prior to the concert, the Orfeo Trio conducted workshops on piano, cello, violin and chamber music for UCSI students where they shared "trade secrets".

Miami native Bees said it was a fact that rigorous discipline was demanded of classical musical training.

"I was not always as diligent at practising the piano when I was younger," she said.

An opportunity to watch celebrated Chilean pianist Claudio Arrau perform when she was just a 15-year-old helped changed her entire outlook.

"Watching his great performance, I felt that life would be worth living if I could be as good as him," said Bees.

It was a life-changing experience for her as from then on, Bees began practising feverishly for up to six hours on the piano.

"She said that it was important for music students to attend concerts regularly.

Shukaev agreed: "It's just like learning a new language, when you listen to a great artiste, you absorb their styles, their ideas and the atmosphere."

As the youngest musician of the trio, Zvonnikov said musicians can pick up good techniques when watching concerts.

Institute of Music director Prof Dr P'ng Tean Hwa said apart from

being an independent unit within the university, the institute would be able to chart its own course and even have a global presence.

"We can begin more collaborations with international and national partners. At the community level, we hope to use the institute as a centre to organise music workshops and seminars," said Dr P'ng.

He said that an international piano competition was in the pipeline and that the institute would offer more courses at postgraduate level.

UCSI University vice-chancellor Tan Sri Dr Abdul Rahman Arshad said the university was unwavering in its support for the Institute.

"While we are pushing very hard for more science courses, the humanities is equally important.

Music is a very significant component of civilisation," said Dr Abdul Rahman.

UCSI University is a contributor to the Star Education Fund.





In harmony: The Orfeo trio, (foreground from left) Zvonnikov, Bees and Shukaev.