

# Harmonica takes centre stage at UCSI

AS the first private institution in Malaysia to offer degrees in music, UCSI University's Institute of Music is no stranger to breaking new ground. Students pursuing UCSI's Bachelor of Classical Music (Hons) or Foundation in Music with a classical specialisation will be able to choose the harmonica as their major instrument.

A project which has been in the pipeline for more than a year, the syllabus was written from scratch with the combined efforts of Prof Dr P'ng Tean Hwa, director of UCSI IMus; Ysan Sui Yin, head of the Classical Music programme; and Ho Chee Kin, UCSI alumnus and award-winning harmonica artiste.

"The harmonica has been a niche instrument but over the years, we have seen it rise in popularity," said Prof P'ng.

"Our students have even participated and won in a few harmonica competitions. A formalised study has been a long time coming and I am pleased that UCSI is able to take the lead."

Ho has been playing the harmonica since he was 14 and in building the syllabus, he has incorporated all his playing techniques he had perfected over the past 22 years.

Ho's distinctive playing skills has taken him all over the world where he bested the competition in Germany, Japan and the UK and



Fresco Harmonica has won multiple awards over the last decade including the coveted championship title twice at the prestigious Germany World Harmonica Festival.

performed at concert halls in Beijing, Hong Kong and South Korea.

He won four champion titles at the International Harmonica Festival and Competition in Great Britain and was the first to represent Malaysia at an international harmonica competition, where he won a place in *The Malaysia Book of Records*.

Ho will be assuming the lead teaching position of this study at UCSI.

The harmonica is a pocket-sized

instrument of many varieties but players usually go for tremolo, diatonic or chromatic.

The tremolo is known for its distinctive accordion sound while the diatonic is favoured by Blues players as the tuning fits the musical style perfectly.

Both will need to be played with a fellow musician if there is a need for more than one key in a song.

The chromatic, however, stands out as the easiest to play.

"It is adaptable to just about any variety of musical style," said Ho.



Ho Chee Kin has polished his harmonica skills for more than two decades and he's sharing all that he has learned in UCSI's new harmonica syllabus.

"A simple button on the side allows players to slide into any key of their choice making it ideal for solo performers."

While the harmonica may not be the first instrument to come to mind when one thinks about playing music, its popularity is certainly gaining ground.

On the home front, UCSI alumna Evelyn Choong of Fresco Harmonica – a leading harmonica band in Malaysia – is able to look back and trace the difference in public perception a decade ago.

"We had to give a lot of performances just to create awareness," said Choong, who founded the band in 2006 with fellow coursemate Aiden Soon, when they were in their second year of study at UCSI.

Fresco Harmonica has expanded from a performing duo to an ensemble of 10 and have established the first harmonica symphony orchestra in Malaysia.

They won several championship

titles in competitions in Germany, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan and shared the stage with prominent Asian artistes like Shila Amzah, Nicholas Teo and Alan Tam.

UCSI's introduction of the Bachelor of Contemporary Music (Hons) and Master of Music (Performance Studies) contributed to the institute's standing as Malaysia's foremost music force.

It is expanding its Kuala Lumpur campus to encompass two new academic blocks, the institute will continue to train future musicians in dedicated teaching studios, practice rooms and a 500-seat recital hall.

■ To find out more about UCSI University's Institute of Music, call 03-9101 8882 or log on to [www.ucsiuniversity.edu.my/onlineenquiry](http://www.ucsiuniversity.edu.my/onlineenquiry).

The KL campus is also open daily for extended counselling sessions, inclusive of weekends and public holidays.