



Jing is all focused on hitting the right keys. — Picture by Hari Anggara

Piano prodigies shine at competition

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KUALA LUMPUR — Music students as young as seven came together to showcase their talents at UCSI University's second International Piano Festival and Competition recently.

If they were nervous playing a grand piano in the Le Quadri Hotel ballroom within the university's campus grounds, they certainly did not show it.

The competition was divided into four categories based age: junior (10 and below), intermediate (15 and below), senior (18 and below), and young artist (24 and below).

Yap Yi Zhe, 15, impressed the judges to win the Best Etude Award for the intermediate category — an award for a short musical composition designed to focus on a particular aspect of playing technique, known as an etude.

"I started playing the piano when I was four, and completed my Grade 8 when I was 11.

"When I was nine, I skipped to Grade 5,

and when I was 11, I skipped to Grade 8," said Yi Zhe, who is autistic.

Winner of the Etude Award for Young Artists, 20-year-old Cheng Yining from China said: "I was afraid of playing the etude piece, and I was so nervous. Etude is extremely hard because it's based purely on technique. I did not expect to win, but I am very happy that I won."

She will be sitting for her final exams once she returns home this week, but she is glad to be able to take home this award before that.

Another etude winner is Koay Wan Ern, 17, for the senior category.

A music major at UCSI, Wan Ern said: "I aimed quite high, but because I only spent five months polishing the pieces, I felt that I did not play up to the standard that I intended to."

Indonesian Clarissa Amanda Mogi, 15, was thrilled at winning the senior category.

"I am so happy that I won because I can get a scholarship now. I took part in this competition because I want to continue studying music in university.

"I wish to become a renowned pianist someday," she said.



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The oldest participant was 24-year-old Arthur Athan from Australia, who successfully conquered the young artist category with his remarkable renditions of Scarlatti's *Sonata in G Major*, Vivaldi's *Sonata No. 3*, and Liszt's *Dante Sonata* from *Années de pèlerinage 2*.

Looking like a little princess in her pink flowy dress, seven-year-old Chen Jing from Singapore was excited to travel here for the competition, and even more so after

winning the award, beating 38 others in her category.

"This is the first time I am participating in this competition.

"My parents introduced me to the piano, and I really like playing it. I want to be a pianist, or maybe a piano teacher when I grow up," she said.

UCSI University Institute of Music director Prof P'ng Tean Hwa said he was proud of the participants' level of technique.

"In the training of a pianist, it's very common for us to play an etude from famous composers such as Chopin, Bach or Rachmaninoff.

"In a competition, the fastest way to screen through the participants to see whether they have sufficient technical ability is through etudes as they are not very long."

He added that the preliminary round was held on April 23 with the selection for the finals done over the last two months. Local participants came for auditions on campus while international participants sent in YouTube recordings of themselves playing.

The competition saw a total of 116 participants.