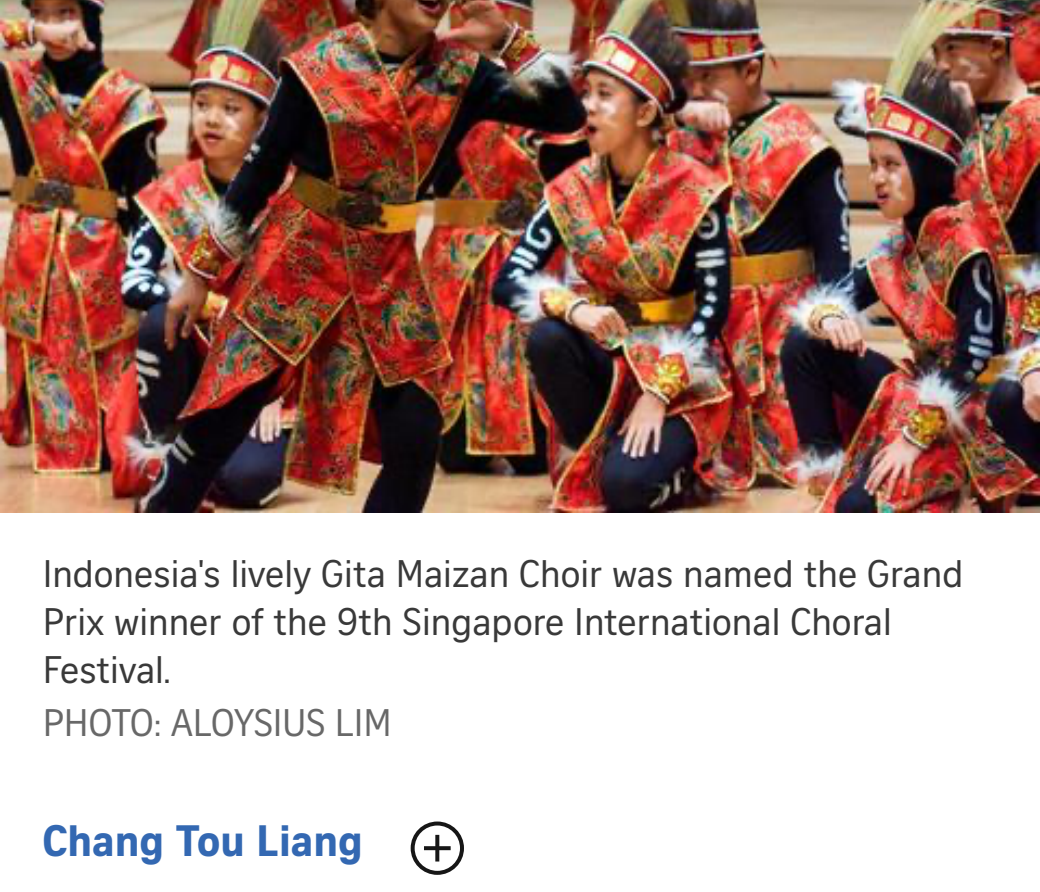


Concert review: S'pore International Choral Competition Grand Prix Concert showcases choral excellence

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Indonesia's lively Gita Maizan Choir was named the Grand Prix winner of the 9th Singapore International Choral Festival.

PHOTO: ALOYSIUS LIM

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9th Singapore International Choral Festival

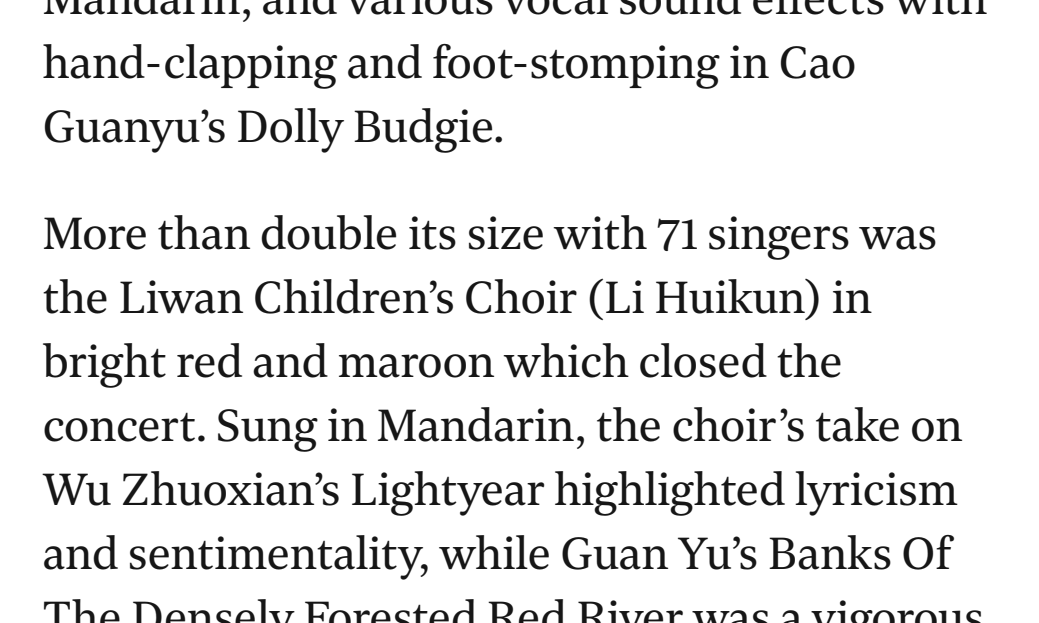
Grand Prix Concert & Award Ceremony

Esplanade Concert Hall

July 27, 7.30pm

The culmination of the 9th Singapore International Choral Festival, organised by One Choral Company and Rave Group International, was its Grand Prix concert on July 27.

The eight best choirs, selected from a field of 74 from 11 territories spread over 11 choral categories, vied for the top prize. The two-hour concert was a showcase of choral excellence and diversity in harmony.



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There were two children's choirs, both from China. Opening the evening was the Shenyang Radio and Television Children's Choir (chorusmaster Liu Jiaqi) with 34 singers in bright olive-green outfits. They impressed with clarity and homogeneity in Xingzimin Pan's New Qingping Music Village Residence sung in Mandarin, and various vocal sound effects with hand-clapping and foot-stomping in Cao Guanyu's Dolly Budgie.

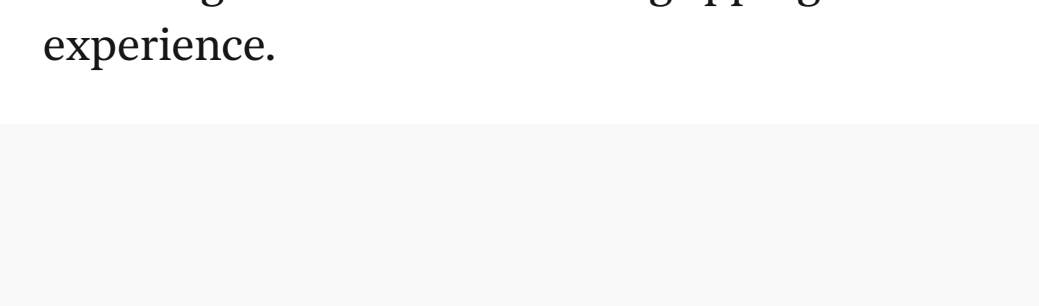
More than double its size with 71 singers was the Liwan Children's Choir (Li Huikun) in bright red and maroon which closed the concert. Sung in Mandarin, the choir's take on Wu Zhuoxian's Lightyear highlighted lyricism and sentimentality, while Guan Yu's Banks Of The Densely Forested Red River was a vigorous highland song in a local Yunnan dialect, accompanied by a traditional folk singer and percussion instruments.

Hong Kong's contribution was the Ying Wa College Choir (Ernest Hui), an ensemble of men smartly attired in black blazers and resembling a university glee club. Its excellent deportment carried into Hong Kong composer Yip Ho-Kwen's Camping Insights, the sung language easily recognisable as Cantonese with excellent pronunciation and diction. Just as idiomatic was its English in The Drop by Latvian composer Andris Dzenitis, based on Urdu poetry by Mirza Ghalib.

There were three choirs from Indonesia. First to perform was Libels Voice Youth Choir (Achmad Yarziq Mubarak) from Surabaya. When women mostly wearing hijabs sing "I believe in God" in Kim Arnesen's Even When He Is Silent with such beauty and sincerity, one's faith is affirmed. In contrast, Katerina Gimon's Fire from Elements, nonsense syllables and percussive beats emphasised the raw and raucous.

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Easily the most colourful outfits were worn by Gita Maizan Choir (Odhi Pratama Maizan) from Yogyakarta, complete with tribal headgear, face paint and bare feet. Sung in Latvian, Perkotevs (Father Thunder) by Laura Jekabsone simulated falling raindrops and wind, building up to a full-blown storm.

Jungle animal sounds, resonant tribal singing and rhythmic movement made West Papuan folk song E Mambo Simbo-2 a gripping experience.

The visual and aural spectacle continued with Puellae Orantes Choir (Wladislaw Pachota) from Poland, resplendent with traditional costumes, floral headbands and ribboned braids.

Johannes Brahms' motet Regina Coeli was founded on purity and innocence, while the mazurka rhythm of Frederic Chopin's Zyczenie (A Maiden's Wish), sung in Polish, was enhanced by pretty and dainty folk dancing.

The third Indonesian choir, Harmony Project (Haryono Sumerah) from North Sulawesi, turned its two songs into a full-blown gospel service with Sumerah's groovy arrangements of a mash-up of the hymns Glory and Nearer My God To Thee, and Kirk Franklin's Love Theory.

With such soulful solos, spirited rapping and exuberant voices, one has to wonder whether one has wandered into Harlem, New York City.

The sole Singapore representative was Choralimus (Chong Wai Lun), winner of the Popular and Jazz category with The Four Tops' Baby, I Need Your Lovin' and John Lennon/Paul McCartney's In My Life. Both had excellent solos backed by very tight close harmony, sung with verve and spirit. So, let it no longer be said that Singapore choirs lack soul or jive.

The 2025 Grand Prix, determined by an international jury of 12, was awarded to the wonderfully vibrant Gita Maizan Choir, which goes on to compete in the 2026 Asian Grand Prix held in South Korea.