

Aces of arts: 2 veteran artists awarded the Cultural Medallion; 5 to receive Young Artist Award

Jazz musician Louis Soliano and dance choreographer Low Mei Yoke have been awarded the Cultural Medallion, Singapore's highest honour in the arts. The two veteran artists will receive the award at the Istana this evening. Five artists - playwright Faith Ng, visual artist Hilmi Johandi, sound designer Lim Ting Li, dancer and choreographer Mohamad Sufri Juwahir, and conductor and music director Zulkifli Mohamed Amin-will also receive the Young Artist Award. The Straits Times speaks to the award recipients.



Clockwise from top left: Dance choreographer Low Mei Yoke, jazz musician Louis Soliano, sound designer Lim Ting Li, visual artist Hilmi Johandi, dancer and choreographer Mohamad Sufri Juwahir, playwright Faith Ng, and conductor and music director Zulkifli Mohamed Amin. ST PHOTOS: ALPHONSUS CHERN, JASMINE CHOONG

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Cultural Medallion recipient: Overcoming the odds for her love of dance



ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

LOW MEI YOKE, 63, CO-FOUNDER AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF DANCE ENSEMBLE FRONTIER DANCELAND

In her 20s, dancer Low Mei Yoke was told that she was too short for ballet. At the same time, the 1.52m-tall dancer also failed auditions for a Chinese dance troupe in Hong Kong.

Undaunted, she went on to pour her life into contemporary dance. "Contemporary dance doesn't worry about height, just as long as you can dance," says the co-founder and artistic director of dance ensemble Frontier Danceland.

She receives the Cultural Medallion for her work as one of Singapore's pioneering choreographers.

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Cultural medallion recipient: He's played with Louis Armstrong



ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

LOUIS SOLIANO, 76, JAZZ MUSICIAN

Jazz musicians tend to be great raconteurs and Louis Soliano is no exception.

The chatty 76-year-old is an endless font of entertaining anecdotes, gleaned from his long years as a professional musician who has played with everyone from legendary jazz musicians Louis Armstrong and Stan Getz to singers Shirley Bassey and Julie London.

He tells a story about meeting actress Raquel Welch at a cocktail party. She handed him her drink to hold and went off to schmooze. He complains jokingly: "I was holding her drink for almost an hour. I drank the gin and tonic."

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YOUNG ARTIST AWARD WINNERS:

Creating soundscapes that evoke emotions



ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

LIM TING LI, 33, SOUND DESIGNER

Although audiences may not pay as much attention to the sounds in a film, sound designer Lim Ting Li believes it is a pivotal dimension to filmic storytelling.

"Just through the soundscape and the music, you can experience the film in a new light."

The daughter of a housewife and a retired businessman, Lim says she took the Film, Sound and Video diploma at Ngee Ann Polytechnic only because her father did not approve of a theatre course at Lasalle College of the Arts.

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Painting Singapore of yore



ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

HILMI JOHANDI, 31, ARTIST

Dreamy visions of Singapore's old amusement parks loom large in Hilmi Johandi's latest installation at the Singapore Art Museum.

An Exposition, now on display at the museum's President's Young Talents exhibition, reflects his fascination with the now-defunct New World, Great World and Happy World and the "utopian vision" their names suggest.

The 31-year-old is one of five people who will receive the Young Artist Award from Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Grace Fu at the Istana tonight.

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Turning his dance hobby into a career



ST PHOTO: JASMINE CHOONG

MOHAMAD SUFRI JUWAHIR, 35, DANCER-CHOREOGRAPHER

Mohamad Sufri Juwahir shocked his parents by dropping out of school to dance. He was studying mechatronics at Temasek Polytechnic, but it was dance, not engineering, that he felt was the true purpose of his life.

He started out as a street dancer in secondary school when he hung out with his friends at the void deck and tried out hip-hop moves that they saw on MTV.

He later picked up contemporary dance during national service and joined local dance company Maya Dance Theatre in 2008, adding Indian classical bharatanatyam dance to his movement vocabulary.

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Playwright's works capture everyday life



ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

FAITH NG, 31, PLAYWRIGHT

When Faith Ng took the introduction to playwriting course in her first year at the National University of Singapore (NUS), her talent was spotted by Checkpoint Theatre's co-founder and joint artistic director Huzir Sulaiman, who staged her play *wo(men)* at the NUS Arts Festival.

"Professional actors were in it and it was given such professional treatment. I was so amazed that they were willing to take my words so seriously," says the married mother of one, recalling the beginning of her playwriting journey.

The daughter of a taxi driver and a housewife, Ng's plays capture a slice of Singapore life: *Normal* (2015) is about her experiences as a normal (academic) student, while *For Better Or For Worse* (2013) follows a married couple and their ups and downs.

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Taking traditional music to a new level



ST PHOTO: ALPHONSUS CHERN

ZULKIFLI MOHAMED AMIN, 35, MUSICIAN

Musician Zulkifli Mohamed Amin, 35, has received the Young Artist Award for taking traditional music to a new level. The award is the National Arts Council's highest honour for artists aged 35 and younger.

He has been conductor and music director of youth orchestra Orkestra Melayu Singapura (OMS) since it was founded in 2005 to nurture new talent in Malay music.

In 2015, he co-founded youth group Nusantara Arts, which integrates different traditional art forms, such as literary works and music.

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