



From C student to ace music teacher

COMPOSER Goh Toh Chai (above), 35, recalls fondly that it was the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts that gave him his first A grade.

As a “mediocre student” in Bedok View Secondary School, he “always got Bs and Cs in my science and mathematics classes because these weren’t subjects I was interested in”, he says.

Instead, he enjoyed playing in the school band and singing in the choir. Even though his family was not well-off, his parents acceded to his request for piano lessons when he was 13. Four years later, he enrolled in Nafa’s School of Performing Arts.

“I was from a neighbourhood school and I didn’t have much confidence. At Nafa, we had the chance to perform on stage regularly, which helped to boost my confidence,” he says.

After obtaining his diploma in music in 1989, he won a scholarship to work on his Master of Piano at the University Of Kansas in the United States.

During his four years there, he was awarded the prestigious Anthony Cius Prize for Outstanding Student Composer twice.

He took up a full-time teaching position in Nafa in 2002. His works have been performed by local symphonic bands and choirs both here and abroad.

Come May, the wind band from the University of Kansas will perform his latest work, Saxophone Concertino, in six cities in China.

“The students I teach now are full of the same passion for music as I was. But the facilities and career options for them are much better now,” he says with a laugh.