

The Singing Professor

Koh Khee Meng

artzone interviewed Prof Koh Khee Meng on his roles as a vocalist in NUS Choir and a Professor in Mathematics.

Could you tell us what to expect in your performance during NUS Arts Festival 2008?

I will sing my heart out! I hope that the audience can enjoy and appreciate the songs and perhaps sense that I have tried to inject my feelings into the music. I will be singing two popular Chinese songs - "敢问路在何方" and "美丽的传说". As an NUS staff, I feel honoured to take part in NUS Arts Festival.

What does it take to be a vocalist, how do you train for it?

It takes a certain amount of talent and aptitude in the areas such as voice, musicality and interest in singing. As one progresses, proper voice training becomes more important.

I train regularly with the NUS Choir. We do vocal warm-up exercises and other vocal exercises, besides working to harmonise together. Finally, it is necessary to listen to good singers and learn from them.

As a mathematician, do you think music and mathematics have anything in common?

I suppose what is common is the passion that mathematics and music both inspire in each of their practitioners. Also, I find that a mathematics teacher and singer both try to convey and explain something of beauty. The singer has to understand the song to be able to express the meaning in the medium given, quite like teaching mathematics.

What is your advice to students who want to make performing arts their profession?

It is very good to be an amateur as it is a break from work and makes life more balanced. To be a professional in Singapore, as we would say in mathematics, talent and persistence is necessary but not sufficient. I have to be honest to advise that one must really consider carefully about being a professional as it is not easy to survive in Singapore.

Catch Prof Koh as he performs in

Melodious Affinity 《三月天: 缘》
by NUS Chinese Orchestra
22 Mar, 8pm, University Cultural Centre Hall
\$20, \$15, \$11, \$9 (excluding ticket fee)