

Jaap van Zweden conducts Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra with Alexandre Kantorow

(Hong Kong/France)



20 Feb 2024, Tue, 7.30pm Esplanade Concert Hall

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The centre works in close partnership with local, regional and international artists to develop artistic capabilities and content, push artistic boundaries and engage audiences. Esplanade supports the creation of artistic content by commissioning and producing new Singapore and Asian work for the international stage. It also develops technical capabilities for the industry nationally.

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Programme

Daniel Lo Ting-Cheung

Asterismal Dance*
*Commissioned by Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra

Rachmaninov

Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini

Intermission

Mahler

Symphony No. 1 'Titan'

Approximately 1hr 40mins, including a 20mins intermission.



Photo Credit: Eric Hong, Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra

Jaap van Zweden

Music Director

Over the past decade, conductor Jaap van Zweden has made significant impact on the international music scene, spanning three continents. Currently serving as Music Director of the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra, as well as the New York Philharmonic (NY Phil), and he is set to take on the role of Music Director of the Seoul Philharmonic in 2024. He has made guest appearances as a conductor with renowned orchestras across Europe, including the Orchestre de Paris, Amsterdam's Royal Concertgebouw, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Vienna Philharmonic, Berlin Philharmonic and the London Symphony Orchestra. In the United States, he has conducted the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, The Cleveland Orchestra and Los Angeles Philharmonic.

Maestro van Zweden has an extensive discography which includes the world premiere of David Lang's *prisoner of the state* (2020) and Julia Wolfe's Grammy-nominated *Fire in my mouth* (2019), both recorded with the NY Phil and released by Universal Music Group's Decca Gold. With the HK Phil, he recorded Richard Wagner's complete *Ring* Cycle, along with the recent recordings of Gustav Mahler's Symphony no. 10 and Dimitri Shostakovich's Symphonies no. 5, 9 and 10, all under the Naxos label.

In recognition of his significant contributions to the development of the HK Phil and classical music in Hong Kong, Jaap van Zweden was honored with the Silver Bauhinia Star by the HKSAR Government. He was conferred the Honorary Fellowship by Lingnan University in 2020, an Honorary University Fellowship by Hong Kong Baptist University, and an Honorary Doctorate by The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts in 2021. He also received the prestigious 2023 Concertgebouw Prize.

In 1997, Maestro van Zweden and his wife Aaltje founded the Papageno Foundation to support families of children with autism.



Photo Credit: Sasha Gusov

Alexandre Kantorow

Piano

Alexandre Kantorow is the winner of the 2024 Gilmore Artist Award, the youngest pianist and the first French artist to receive this accolade. Four years ago, at the age of 22, he was the first French pianist to win the Gold Medal at the Tchaikovsky Competition, also receiving the Grand Prix, previously awarded only three times in the competition's history. Now in demand at the highest level worldwide, he is applauded for his innate poetic charm, luminous clarity, and stunning virtuosity.

In recital, Mr. Kantorow appears at major concert halls such as the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Queen Elizabeth Hall in London and Philharmonie de Paris, and in 2023 he made his debut at Carnegie Hall and Tokyo Opera City. He performs regularly at the most prestigious festivals around the globe, including the Ravinia Festival, Verbier Festival and BBC Proms. Chamber music is one of his great pleasures, and he performs with artists such as violinist Renaud Capuçon, violist Antoine Tamestit, cellist Gautier Capuçon, and baritone Matthias Goerne.

Highlights of Mr. Kantorow's upcoming seasons include concerts with the Pittsburgh Symphony, Berliner Philharmoniker, Orchestre de Paris, Philharmonia, Rotterdam Philharmonic and tours with the Munich Philharmonic and Hong Kong Philharmonic orchestras amongst others, and with conductors including Manfred Honeck, Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Jaap van Zweden, Francois-Xavier Roth and Klaus Mäkelä. Past highlights have included performances with the Boston Symphony, Budapest Festival and Israel Philharmonic orchestras, and with conductors such as Sir Antonio Pappano and Valery Gergiev.

Mr. Kantorow records exclusively for BIS, now part of Apple Music. All his recordings have received the highest critical acclaim internationally as well as multiple awards, including several Diapason d'Or, Victoires de la musique Classique and Trophée d'Année and in 2022 he was featured in Gramophone magazine, with a full front-page cover and Editor's Choice.

Mr. Kantorow is a laureate of the Safran Foundation and of the Banque Populaire Foundation. Born in France and of French British heritage, Mr. Kantorow studied with Pierre-Alain Volondat, Igor Lazko, Frank Braley, and Rena Shereshevskaya.

Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra

Music Director

Jaap van Zweden, SBS

Principal Guest Conductor

Long Yu

Resident Conductor

Lio Kuokman, JP



Photo Credit: Eric Hong, Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra

The Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra (HK Phil) is regarded as one of the leading orchestras in Asia. Professionalised in 1974, the orchestra celebrates its 50th anniversary during the 2023/24 season. Collaborating with internationally renowned conductors and soloists, the orchestra presents more than 150 concerts and attracts more than 200,000 music lovers annually.

The HK Phil promotes the work of Hong Kong and Chinese composers, commissions new works, nurtures local talent and runs extensive education and community programmes. With Music Director Jaap van Zweden since 2012, the HK Phil has toured Europe, Asia, Australia and extensively across Mainland China. Long Yu has been Principal Guest Conductor since the 2015/16 season, and Lio Kuokman was appointed Resident Conductor in December 2020. The HK Phil won the prestigious UK classical music magazine Gramophone's 2019 Orchestra of the Year Award – the first orchestra in Asia to receive this accolade. Recent recording projects with Jaap include the complete Ring Cycle by Richard Wagner, Mahler's Symphony no. 10 (concert version ed. Mengelberg/Dopper), and Shostakovich's Symphonies no. 5, 9 and 10. In 2021, the HK Phil founded The Orchestra Academy Hong Kong (co-directed with The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts), aimed at offering professional training and facilitating orchestral careers for its participants.

The Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra is financially supported by the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and is a Venue Partner of the Hong Kong Cultural Centre.

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First Associate Concertmaster Leung Kin-fung

Second Associate Concertmaster Anders Hui

Second Associate Concertmaster Wang Liang

Third Associate Concertmaster Bei de Gaulle

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Ba Wenjing
Cheng Li
Gui Li
Li Chi
Li Zhisheng
Liu Fangxi
Mao Hua
Rachael Mellado
Soojeong Yoon
Zhang Xi
Jia Shuchen #
James Li Chun-lam *
Wang Yue *

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Domas Juškys ■
Leslie Ryang Moonsun ▲
Fang Jie
Gallant Ho Ka-leung
Liu Boxuan
Mao Yiguo
Katrina Rafferty
Vivian Shen
Miyaka Suzuki Wilson
Tomoko Tanaka
Christine Wong
Zhang Yuchen
Zhou Tengfei

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Programme Notes



Daniel Lo Ting-Cheung Asterismal Dance

Asterismal Dance* for orchestra is a scherzo fantastique brimming with a sense of eager and energetic rhythm. Since ancient times, when people gazed at the starry night, they naturally transformed isolated stars into an alluring collection of constellations through imagination and association. 2018 Nobel

Prize in Literature laureate and Polish writer Olga Tokarczuk described her writing as "constellation novels". Tokarczuk excels at blending disparate writing styles, hoping that readers, guided by the clues laid out in her novels, can piece together the diverse texts into an intricate narrative.

The creative concept of Asterismal Dance is akin to Tokarczuk's writing style. The composition does not adhere to the common forms of classical music but unfolds a series of musical materials of distinct characteristics nonlinearly (all of which are derived from a basic motif). These materials traverse different instrumental sections of the orchestra, like the scattered stars in the sky. As the music progresses, the musical materials constantly conjure up different forms, varying, expanding and overlapping in many ways, intertwining a dance as complex as the galaxy.

Programme notes written by Daniel Lo Ting-Cheung.

^{*}Commissioned by the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra to celebrate the orchestra's 50th Anniversary season.

Sergei Rachmaninov

Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op. 43

The Story

Whether mad or pure genius, there's no denying that Nicolo Paganini was the greatest showman of the 19th century. He was famous for the wild rumours that surrounded him: he always went onstage with a concert attire that was always entirely black, complete with his dishevelled hair and gaunt appearance; he never confirmed nor denied that he had sold his soul to the devil for his talent, fame, and fortune; and it was rumoured that the fourth string of his violin, which was especially resonant, had been made from the intestine of his mistress whom he had murdered.

For all that he was, he lived up to his own hype, with seemingly nothing he could not do. Where others played harmonics, he played double-stopped harmonics; where others wrote octave double-stops, he wrote tenths. He invented a technique of plucking notes with the left hand, and became known for the 'ricochet' technique—where the bow would bounce quickly across the strings. These techniques were documented in his 24 caprices for solo violin, the last of which was arranged for piano by the great Romantic virtuosos Schumann, Liszt, and Brahms.

Rachmaninov saw himself as part of that great tradition of Romantic virtuoso pianist-composers. He was generally regarded as the finest pianist among the many great soloists of that era, with his tall figure, impressive stage presence, and playing posture which showed him perfectly still at the keyboard, his movements only in his fingers and hands, which struck all the notes with great clarity and precision. However, in the 1930s, it had been a long time since he wrote any large work for piano and orchestra, having devoted to building his career as a pianist as he tried to eke out a living for himself and his family after escaping from Russia at the age of 45. His most popular work, the Prelude in C# minor, was already more than 40 years old, and his Second and Third Piano Concertos were written decades ago.

In 1934, Rachmaninov's bauhaus-style Villa Senar on the shores of Lake Lucerne was ready, and Steinway had sent him a customised piano for his 60th birthday. He had spent a fortune building this Villa, trying to replicate the Russian countryside house he grew up in. As it turned out, this *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* would be the work that he would compose on his new piano, pay off his Villa, as well as restore his reputation as a composer.

The Music

The original 24th caprice by Paganini consisted of a theme followed by 11 variations and a finale. Rachmaninov doesn't begin with the theme—he starts with a short introduction followed by a first variation where the orchestra introduces the underlying harmonies, before the theme is (rightfully) introduced by the violins. In the next few variations Rachmaninov dazzles and charms the audience until the seventh Variation.

Here, the piano part introduces the *Dies Irae*, the Latin chant for the day of wrath, over a bassoon playing a fragmented theme.



www.gregorian-chant-hymns.com/hymns-2/dies-ire.html

In response to choreographer Mikhail Fokine's suggestion that he collaborate on a ballet with Rachmaninov, Rachmaninov set a narrative with the Rhapsody:

"Consider the Paganini legend—about the sale of his soul to the Evil Spirit in exchange for perfection in art, and for a woman. All variations on the *Dies Irae* would be for the Evil Spirit."

After the introduction of the Evil Spirit in Variation 7 with the *Dies Irae*, the Variations 8 - 10 would mark the progress of this Evil Spirit. Rachmaninov then continues on with the story of Paganini: "The whole middle from the 11th variation to the 18th—these are the <u>love episodes... Variation 11 is the transition</u> to the realm of love.

Variation 12—the minuet—is the first appearance of the woman—through the 18th variation. Variation 13 is the first understanding between the woman and Paganini."

The heart of this work is Variation 18, where Rachmaninov inverts the main melody, changes it into a major key, and writes a swooning, sappy, heart-on-your-sleeve love song. This most original variation became a hit with Hollywood, and most notably used in two of the best time travel / love story movies, Somewhere in Time (1980) and Groundhog Day (1993).

In Variation 19 we find 'the triumph of Paganini's art, his diabolic *pizzicato*', and the *Dies Irae* is also brought back, what Rachmaninov meant as 'a dialogue with Paganini and the Evil Spirit'. From here to the end of the work are more brilliant variations with all the pyrotechnics one can do on the piano, before Paganini appears in the 23rd variation, defeated, 'after which, to the end, is the triumph of his conquerors'.

Rachmaninov's sense of humour was quite apparent in the letter to Fokine, revealing the Evil Spirit in his made-up story to be 'caricatures, absolute caricatures, of Paganini himself. And they should here have 82 violins that are even more fantastically monstrous.'

Programme notes written by Natalie Ng

Gustav Mahler

Symphony No. 1, 'Titan'

The Story

On January 16, 1910, Rachmaninov had played his Third Piano Concerto as the soloist in Carnegie Hall with the New York Philharmonic, conducted by 50-year-old Gustav Mahler (1860 - 1911). Rachmaninov had only high praise for Mahler and remarked, "Mahler was the only conductor whom I considered worthy to be classed with Nikisch. He devoted himself to the concerto until the accompaniment, which is rather complicated, had been practised to perfection. Every detail of the score was important to him, an attitude too rare amongst conductors."

Perhaps Mahler's diligence and meticulousness in studying the music stemmed from the fact that he, too, was a composer as well. One only has to look at the number of performance directions he included (in German phrases, because the traditional Italian terms were definitely not sufficient) in any of his works, especially his symphonies, to get an idea of the kind of person he was.

"A symphony must be like the world. It must encompass everything."

-Gustav Mahler

Not only did Mahler encompass everything in this symphony, he also turned the symphonic form on its head, from the very first version of the symphony created in 1889 to the final version of 1899, with three major revisions in between.

Our story starts in the German city of Kassel in 1884. Mahler had gone there to work as a conductor, and had found love, or rather, an unrequited love affair with a soprano named Johanna Richter. Mahler poured his feelings into a series of love poems, which later became the text to his song cycle *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* (Songs of a Wayfarer), and the impetus for the First Symphony.

For someone whose real day job was a conductor, and who was moonlighting as a composer, Mahler had not yet written a symphony, but had composed incidental music (that he also included in this symphony) and studied many symphonies to conduct them.

Encompassed in this symphony was also the world as Mahler knew it: birdsong at dawn, Austrian folk song, yodeling, cafe music, military fanfares, reveille, a children's song, a woodcut depiction of the children's story titled *The Hunter's Funeral Procession* by Austrian artist Moritz von Schwind, among other sights, sounds and feelings encoded in the music that we may never find out.

Even with all that on his palette, Mahler couldn't decide what this creation was—a symphonic poem with a storyline, a programme Symphony like Beethoven's Pastorale, or simply a symphony? How many movements should it have: four, like a standard symphony, or five to fit programme he had in mind?

On 20 November 1889, the Symphonic Poem in Two Parts was premiered in Budapest. This symphonic poem contained three movements in the first part and two in the second part; only the

funeral march was labelled for the audience's information. The elements of Mahler's sound world and the juxtaposition of them had bewildered the audience; the review by a local critic read that there was "a small, but, for all that, audible element of opposition".

For the next two performances in 1893 and 1894 in Hamburg and Weimar, Mahler wrote up a descriptive programme as well as gave titles to the movements, and called the work 'Titan, a tone poem in symphonic form'. The 'Titan' in the title refers to a novel of the same name by Jean Paul in which a man had to discover his hidden past, find his ideal bride, and take the throne of a small German land. Mahler kept the structure to five movements in two sections, and titled the first section *From the Days of Youth; Flower, Fruit and Thorn Pieces* in yet another Jean Paul references to his novel Siebenkäs. He also titled the Andante movement—which he later dropped—*Blumine* (flowers), in evocation of another Jean Paul work *Herbst-Blumine* (Autumn Flowers).

Still, the audiences who heard the work were not convinced, even though Mahler knew that he had written something special. Writing to the woman who would later become his wife, he complained, "Sometimes it sent shivers down my spine. Damn it all, where do people keep their ears and their hearts if they can't hear that!"

It's not difficult to see why: even the symphony's very opening—the single A, as if suspended in stasis, spreading its way through the entire range of the string section and topped with harmonics that give it an eerie glow—sounded as if it belonged to the music of the future, the 20th century, rather than the late 19th century, and challenged the audience (they did not know what to make of Strauss' Also Sprach Zarathustra and Till Eulenspiegel either, which were also premiered at that time).

Along the way, after many revisions and much consideration, Mahler lost faith in programmes and decided to publish the work as Symphony No. 1, Titan, abstract music without an accompanying storyline.

The Music

Taking a leaf from Beethoven's Ninth symphony where fragments are introduced and slowly piece together to become music, Mahler opened his symphony with the gentle hum of the universe, the note A scattered over seven octaves. Then, in a distance, we hear the cuckoo call—an interval of a fourth instead of a third—that brings the sounds of nature to the forefront and morphs into a melody, taken from the second Wayfarer song *Ging heut' Morgen übers Feld* (I went through the fields this morning). This walking melody ambles along, gaining traction as it morphs into an exuberant dance.

In the second movement, yodelling by the upper strings and stomping by the cellos and basses give way into the brief scherzo, music reminiscent of a hearty, village country dance. The trio is wistful, possibly a tune that was played at one of the Viennese cafes, and yodelling and stomping bring back the earlier ländler, which also scurries and grows into yet another exuberant ending. The third movement has baffled and upset audiences since its premiere, and even today it puzzles those encountering it for the first time. It is indeed a strange assortment: a children's folksong that Mahler knew as Bruder Martin (but more commonly known to us as Are you Sleeping, Brother John or 两只老虎 [Two Tigers]) but in the minor key played by the lumbering basses; then suddenly,

the music changes into a raucous bar tune—as if dance music from a drunken *Kletzmer* band comprising cymbals, a bass drum, oboes, clarinets and trumpets.

Scholars suggest that these reflect Mahler's experiences as a child, watching his parents bury seven of his siblings, lost to childhood diseases. A pinewood coffin passing from the nursery past a drunken bar on its way to the cemetery: the world as Mahler knew it.

"Only the mood matters, and out of it—abruptly, like lightning out of a dark cloud—leaps the fourth movement. It is simply the outcry of a deeply wounded heart preceded by that very eerie, ironic, and brooding sultriness of the death march."

—Mahler, 1896 in a letter to music critic and composer Max Marschalk

A flash of lightning and 'outcry of a deeply wounded heart' open the fourth movement, in search for a way to overcome the world. Between the angst and the triumph, along the way some respite is provided in the form of pastoral music (extracts taken from the omitted original second movement *Blumine*). A cuckoo calls—transporting us back to the Wayfarer's fields of the first movement—but now the protagonist strides purposefully, no longer wandering, towards the horn calls of victory, where the horns are instructed to play out 'even over the trumpets', and the battle is won.

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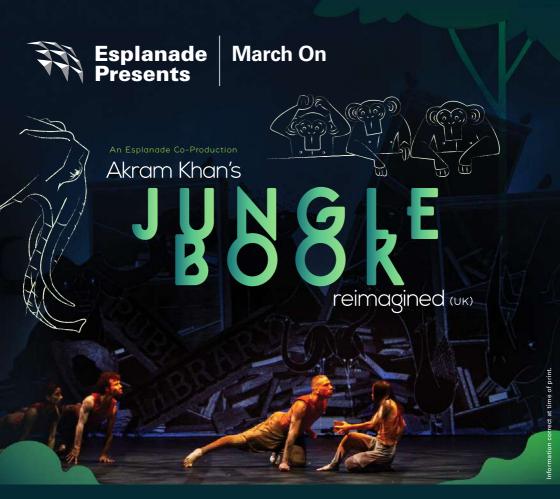




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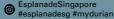


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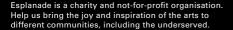


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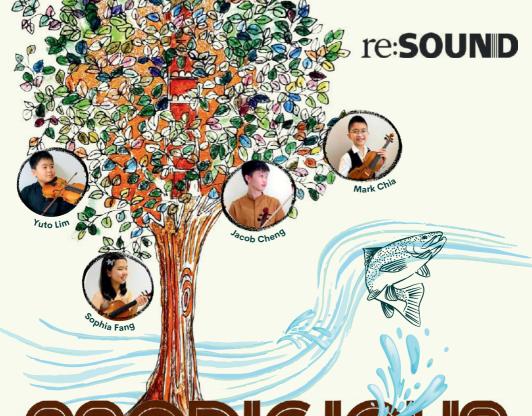
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- Member referral incentives, Birthday privileges and more!
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Free to join



Free upgrade when



Free upgrade when



Free for kids



Free for ages 17 to 26 years



Free for ages



Not a member yet? Join at

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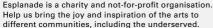


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Esplanade gives our heartfelt thanks

to our Esplanade partner, arts benefactor, donors and sponsors for believing in our vision to be a performing arts centre for everyone. They made all these possible!



activities took place at Esplanade.





3,260,515

People attended our activities at the centre.



Free

1,487,680 287,931

*Figures for Esplanade's activities from Apr 2022 to Mar 2023.



We believe that everyone should be able to experience the joy of the arts, including children, youth, seniors, migrant workers and individuals with special needs. Our community engagement activities bring the arts to those in need.



Your contribution* will make a difference.

On behalf of the communities we serve, thank you! Find out how you too can make a difference through the arts at Esplanade.

Donate at www.esplanade.com/donate

To find out more, email us at donations@esplanade.com or speak with us at 6828 8321.

Esplanade is a charity and an Institution of a Public Character. Your donation to us is matched dollar-for-dollar by the Cultural Matching Fund. Please note that the prevailing tax exemption scheme for donors and sponsors of Arts-Related Businesses will depend on the qualifying criteria imposed by IRAS.

With Gratitude

Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay is a charity, a not-for-profit organisation and Singapore's national performing arts centre. We seek to entertain, engage, educate and inspire through the arts.

We thank everyone who has helped us bring joy, inspiration and positive impact to Singaporeans from all walks of life by supporting the arts and Esplanade.

Our heartfelt appreciation goes especially to our Donors and Sponsors, for their steadfast belief in our mission and for their generous support.

DONORS AND SPONSORS

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Woon Yen Khai Yap Foo Kar Yyonne Tham

The above are donors and sponsors who contributed \$1000 and above from April 2022-March 2023.

Join us in sharing the joy of the arts and help us reach more communities in need.

We believe that an experience with the arts is special and that with your generous support, more people will get a chance to enjoy the arts. Join us in sharing the joy of the arts and help us reach more communities in need.



Esplanade also receives grants from the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth, as well as support for our Community Programmes from the Tote Board Family, comprising Tote Board, Singapore Pools and Singapore Turf Club.

FIERY DEALS ϕ FOR THE DRAGON YEAR

BAG YOUR PROSPERITY WITH ESPLANADE&ME FROM 15 JAN - 25 FEB

Redeem an exclusive mandarin orange bag designed by special needs youth from Singapore Fashion Runway.

Simply become an *Esplanade&Me* member, spend a min of \$5 and upload your receipt(s) to your account.



ENJOY THESE FESTIVE DEALS!



Red House Seafood (#01-14/16) Indulge in savoury seafood and festive specials.



Harry's (#01-05/07) Indulge in citrus flavours at Harry's with limited time specials.



Tomo Izakaya (#01-09) New ramen flavours with complimentary salmon sashimi



Old School Delights (#02-25) Enjoy free Udders ice cream with a minimum spend of \$50.

Not a member yet? Join at www.esplanade.com/membership



Lee Wei Song School of Music (#02-12) Unleash your vocal

Unleash your vocal potential with exclusive open classes.

Find out more:



Spend & Redeem Huayi – Chinese Festival of Arts Red Packets!

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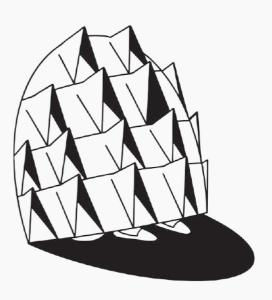


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I could just scroll through IG or TikTok but I thought why should I when I can do the same on Offstage? It makes me feel like I know more things. Great arts content, anytime, anywhere. Highly recommend.

"

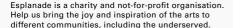
Totally Anonymous Person (who is not related to www.esplanade.com/offstage)



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Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in Singapore
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Esplanade is a charity and not-for-profit organisation. Help us bring the joy and inspiration of the arts to different communities, including the underserved.









