

ALDERSGATE HYMN FESTIVAL charles wesley

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Photos by Raymond Teo



Seven Asian musicians were commissioned to create ten new anthems, based on the lyrics of some of Charles Wesley's hymns, as a way of celebrating his 300th birthday and to commemorate the 10th Anniversary of the Methodist School of Music (MSM).

These ten new choral works, re-mixed with Asian musical flavours debuted at the Aldersgate Hymn Festival on May 20, 2007 at the Victoria Concert Hall.

This idea was first conceived by a member of the MSM Management Committee, Dr Lim Swee Hong, together with Ms Mary Gan, the MSM Principal. **What was the rationale behind putting new melodies to traditional hymns?** "Many traditional hymns, including those by Charles Wesley contain age-old truths and Christian teachings that are universal and still relevant today," said Ms Gan. "However due to changing music tastes, some of these tunes may not appeal to some people, and hence, it is good to set these hymns to bring them afresh to the new generation. This is also a good opportunity for us, as Asian Christians, to contribute

ley: re-tuned



our rich Asian musical resources to the global hymnody.*

Mr Jusuf Kam was assigned the hymn, "Give Me The Faith That Can Remove". Jusuf had this to say about the re-tuning of this hymn: "It was the content of the hymn (a prayer) that struck me. As I depend very much on inspiration when I write music, it took me a long time



to re-tune this hymn. The melody had to convey the same spirit as the words – as it is a prayer song, the tune had to be prayerful as well. I wrote it in the Chinese style so that people can easily identify with it, and sing it during worship."

Ms Mary Tan, one of our Wesley Dawnbreaker choir members was given the hymn, "Lo, He Comes With Clouds



Descending". Mary shares with us the process of re-tuning this hymn : "My first thought was that the Title and Text are beyond me. What does the second advent of the Lord Jesus mean to me? Without understanding the text, writing a new tune would be a perfunctory exercise and rather meaningless. The major influences to writing the tune were the words "Alleluia! Thou shalt reign, and Thou alone". With the help of the living God, I finally found my starting point. The piano accompaniment starts quietly, but dramatically by using a motif from the first line in the song. This is followed by the cascading semi-quavers to convey the "descending" clouds as described in Revelation 1:7. The harmonic progressions of the composition were influenced by the use 'Chromatic Chords' to draw attention to the text. The melody uses musical devices such as sequences, inversion of intervals, repetition to make the melody singable and easier to remember. "

On moving forward, Ms Mary Gan said : "We plan to continue commissioning Asian lyricists to write new texts and composers to compose new music. Perhaps we could have a series that's bilingual (English & Chinese) and another series especially for children or treble choirs. Such projects will require substantial financial support from churches."

The other musicians were **Lim Swee Hong, So Heng** (Singapore), **Joy T Nilo** (Philippines), **Chan Hung Da** (Taiwan) and **Pastor Lu Chen Tiong** (Malaysia). The new compositions were sung by 17 choirs – adult and children choirs of local Methodist churches from the three Annual Conferences, Methodist Girls' School Choir, MSM Choir and the Celebration Chorus.

*Hymnody refers to the practice of singing hymns.



