

Teach to Share – Eleanor Wong (1970)

“We stimulate our students to develop initiative in learning and awareness of its relevance to themselves, to life and to others.” – the Maryknoll mission.

Over the past 20 years, Professor Eleanor Wong, Senior Lecturer and Artist-in Residence (Keyboard) in the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, has nurtured many budding pianists who won top prizes in international and local competitions: Colleen Lee, Rachel Cheung, Aristo Sham, Melodic and Harmonic Chau, and many others.

Colleen Lee learnt piano from Eleanor since she was seven. In 2005, she came sixth in the prestigious International Frederic Chopin Piano Competition, the best achievement ever by a Hong Kong pianist. “Notwithstanding her gifted talent, Colleen put in tireless efforts in practices - she believes only practice makes perfect,” Eleanor commented on one of her favorite pupils.

Rachel Cheung, also a Maryknoller, was Professor Wong’s student since the age of nine. She won the fifth prize at the Leeds International Pianoforte Competition, the best result ever by a Hong Kong pianist in this celebrated competition. “Her music is especially stirring – she plays with her heart as well as her brain. She has a strong musical acumen and displays exceptional maturity in her performances”. Eleanor remarked with pride.

Aristo Sham, an acclaimed piano prodigy, gave a stunning performance at the 2008 Gina Bachauer International Junior Piano Competition and won the first prize. “He is very gifted and masters the music language well, but he could do with a little more practicing.” Eleanor grimaced.

Twin sisters Melodic and Harmonic Chau were the first and youngest team from Hong Kong to win the first prize and three special prizes at the 4th International Piano Duo Competition in Poland in 2010. “Tacit communication between players is a critical element of stellar duo performances. Inborn bonding gave the twins a special advantage but no guarantee of success. Their success was hard earned. They practice as diligently as Colleen and therefore celebrated similar successes.” Professor Wong concluded after having taught the twins for 15 years.

Following the Maryknoll Sisters’ example in dedication to education, Eleanor has taken up teaching young local pianists as her lifetime mission. “Through teaching I am able to pass on what I have to the next generation.” She explained.

Eleanor started at MSC from Primary 6. As a child prodigy who began piano playing at the age of seven, she learnt that to be able to share her talents is a great blessing. A Sister has once told her, “When you are gifted, you have to share. You perform not to show off your talents - it is to share what you have with others who may not have the same gift.”

Upon graduation from Form 5 in 1970, Eleanor earned an Associated Board Scholarship to study with Frederic Jackson and Max Pirani at the Royal Academy of Music in London. She later moved to New York to study with Vlado Perlemuter in Paris Conservatoire and Artur Balsam while at the same time embarked on a performing career. In 1983, Eleanor withdrew from the stage to focus on teaching.

Four decades have passed since Eleanor’s graduation from MCS but the teachings are deeply rooted in her heart. “The Sisters taught us to embrace life with nobility, to serve others with compassion and to contribute to society. Over the years, I came to appreciate these values more and more.”

An MCS Graduate is a loving person who recognizes and brings out the virtues in people. “The Sisters regarded academic achievement to be only one of the many facets of education. They emphasized all-round development and encouraged us to develop our own interests in music, sports and any healthy pursuits.” To Eleanor, teaching piano is more than skill training, she is to help her students grow and glow, strive for excellence to the best of their capabilities, take responsibility and stand tall in face of challenges.