



Fairfield Methodist School pupil Travis Wong was named the overall winner of the 31st Andrea Postacchini International Violin Competition in Fermo, central Italy, in May. ST PHOTO: SHINTARO TAY

S'porean, 9, wins top prize and specially crafted violin at prestigious contest in Italy

He beats over 100 people from around the world, some more than three times his age

Chin Hui Shan

Little Travis Wong spent almost a week in Italy in May and left Europe with a couple of very special items in his luggage: a specially crafted violin and a Medal of the Senate of the Italian Republic.

The young Singaporean musician also added another accolade to his burgeoning list of milestones.

Just weeks after turning nine, Travis was named the “absolute” – or overall – winner of the 31st Andrea Postacchini International Violin Competition in Fermo, in central Italy, besting participants more than three times older.

The talented boy, however, was confused when he was called up on stage at the over 200-year-old Teatro dell'Aquila opera house on May 25 and presented with a Stra-

divari model violin, made by luthier Giacomo Nibid, and a bow by bow maker Walter Barbiero.

“The compere was speaking in Italian, so I didn’t understand what was happening,” said Travis with an embarrassed smile.

“I had thought they wanted me to play again and was wondering why didn’t they pass me my own violin... It was only after I went backstage that they explained to me that I was the absolute winner.”

Travis had played twice earlier that day – to the judges in the morning and in front of a large crowd at night – with a borrowed three-quarter-sized violin.

The Fairfield Methodist School pupil’s overall win came on top of him winning Category A (aged eight to 11) of the competition, which came with a €1,400 (\$2,040) cash prize.

In all, more than 100 participants from around the world took part in the competition, which is open to those between the ages of eight and 32, and has four categories.

Travis said he took part in the competition simply to gain exposure, adding that it was his first

time performing in front of a big crowd abroad like the one at Teatro dell'Aquila, which can seat more than 800 people.

“I was quite nervous before I went on stage,” he said, “but (when) I started playing my first note, I felt completely fine and could enjoy my music.”

The prestigious competition, which was first held in 1994, draws musicians from around the world and has developed a reputation as an event for talent-spotting prodigies.

A WAY WITH MUSIC

I always imagine different parts of my music have different story plots in my head, and I use that to express myself when I play. When I see my audience enjoying my music, I feel happy.



VIOLINIST TRAVIS WONG

Singapore’s Chloe Chua, whom Travis looks up to, won Category A of the competition when she was 10 in 2017. She is currently an artist-in-residence with Singapore Symphony Orchestra.

Travis first grabbed headlines in 2021 at the age of five when he achieved a distinction in the Grade 8 violin performance examination conducted by the London-based Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM).

For violin exams by ABRSM, Grade 8 is the highest level before the suite of diplomas taken at the professional level.

He first picked up the violin at age three, after watching a YouTube orchestra video featuring Jurassic Park songs.

In the past three years, Travis has attended violin master classes in Oxford, Britain, and won in competitions such as the GSF Singapore Festival 2023 and 2024 Concert Artists International Competition.

His mother, Ms Joleen Toh, said his progress surpassed her expectations.

“I will support his passion for as long as he is still loving it. We’ll take it one day at a time,” said the housewife, who is in her 40s.

“My hope for him is that he will always be happy in whatever he

chooses to do.”

Travis still loves dinosaurs, and sports the same bowl haircut he did when he was five.

But he has learnt to express himself more confidently when playing the violin – the result of playing the instrument daily for up to two hours, and up to four hours when preparing for a competition.

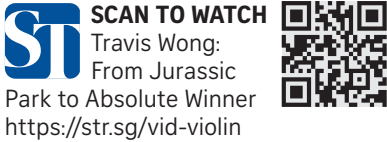
When ST visited him on June 12, the cherubic, bubbly boy transformed into a focused virtuoso the moment the violin rested on his collarbone, playing it with verve and energy, and with emotion etched on his face.

His experience in Italy has stoked his ambitions to continue playing in front of audiences, and eventually become a professional violinist.

“I think I can tell (the audience) a story through my music,” he said.

“I always imagine different parts of my music have different story plots in my head, and I use that to express myself when I play. When I see my audience enjoying my music, I feel happy.”

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ByteDance fails to block S'pore-based firm's trademark application for short video app

Aqil Hamzah

TikTok’s parent company ByteDance failed to block an application by a Singapore-based firm to register the trademark of its short video app Tiki, which it said was similar to the marks it registered for its popular social media platform.

In a legal decision published by the Intellectual Property Office of Singapore (Ipos) on June 14, principal assistant registrar Mark Lim said ByteDance was unable to convince him that the marks were similar, nor did it establish the element of misrepresentation, which led to his decision.

Singapore-based Dol Technology first applied to register the trademark for Tiki in 2021, leading ByteDance to file its notices of opposition subsequently on Dec 23, 2021, and Jan 18, 2022.

The Tiki app by Dol Technology was launched in India on Feb 22, 2021, and allowed users to “create, watch and share short videos with friends”.

It shut down on June 27, 2023, citing challenges faced by the tech industry.

Explaining his decision, Mr Lim



said the marks for Tiki and TikTok were “visually and conceptually dissimilar”, and “aurally similar only to a low extent” when their names are read aloud. The TikTok logo for one depicts a musical note, compared with Tiki’s use of a stylised letter “T” incorporated into a play icon, he explained.

He added that if he decided otherwise, it would mean all two-syllable words that begin with “tic”, such as ticket, ticker, or Tic Tac, would be considered to be similar to TikTok’s trademark.

Because the trademarks were dissimilar, Mr Lim said he did not believe the average consumer would be confused between the two.

Man fined \$600k for converting 11 properties into dorms

A 72-year-old man was fined \$600,000 for converting 11 private residential properties into unauthorised dormitories that he then rented out to migrant workers. One of the units housed 23 foreigners.

Inspections carried out between January 2016 and April 2018 found that Tan Hock Keng had carved multiple rooms in the residences.

At a unit in Geylang, enforcement officers from the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) found that the floor and walls of the kitchen and toilets were badly stained.

They also discovered bedbug stains in a bedroom of another unit nearby.

On May 30, Tan was convicted of three charges, with eight additional charges for similar offences at other private residential properties taken into consideration.

The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) in a statement on June 14 said that MOM enforcement officers who inspected properties linked to Tan found that the number of occupants “significantly exceeded” the authority’s occupancy cap rules.

Under its regulations, private residential properties can house up to only six unrelated people, or eight unrelated occupants if the property owners succeed in their application for a temporary relaxation of the cap.

During one inspection carried out on Dec 15, 2017, MOM officers found nine migrant workers in a flat on the third storey of a building in Serangoon.

The flat had been divided into 15 rooms, eight of which were locked. There were nine beds in the unlocked rooms.

Investigations showed that Tan had offered the unit as a dormitory for about two years, charging about \$500 for a room with one occupant and \$550 for a room with two occupants.

Fifteen migrant workers were housed there during that period, with Tan pocketing the rent.

Another inspection carried out on March 13, 2018 found 16 workers residing in a flat in Geylang and 17 in a unit nearby.

The URA statement said Tan admitted to knowing the regulations, but decided to convert the residences into dormitories anyway. He was charged in court in November 2021.

Mr Martin Tan, the director of URA’s Development Control Group, said: “Unauthorised dormitory accommodation not only adversely affects the residential character of the neighbourhood, but also negatively impacts the occupants, who may be from more vulnerable groups that are susceptible to exploitation.”

Aqil Hamzah

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ByteDance was unable to convince Ipos that the marks for short video app Tiki and social media platform TikTok were similar. Launched in 2021, Tiki was shut down in 2023. PHOTO: REUTERS

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