

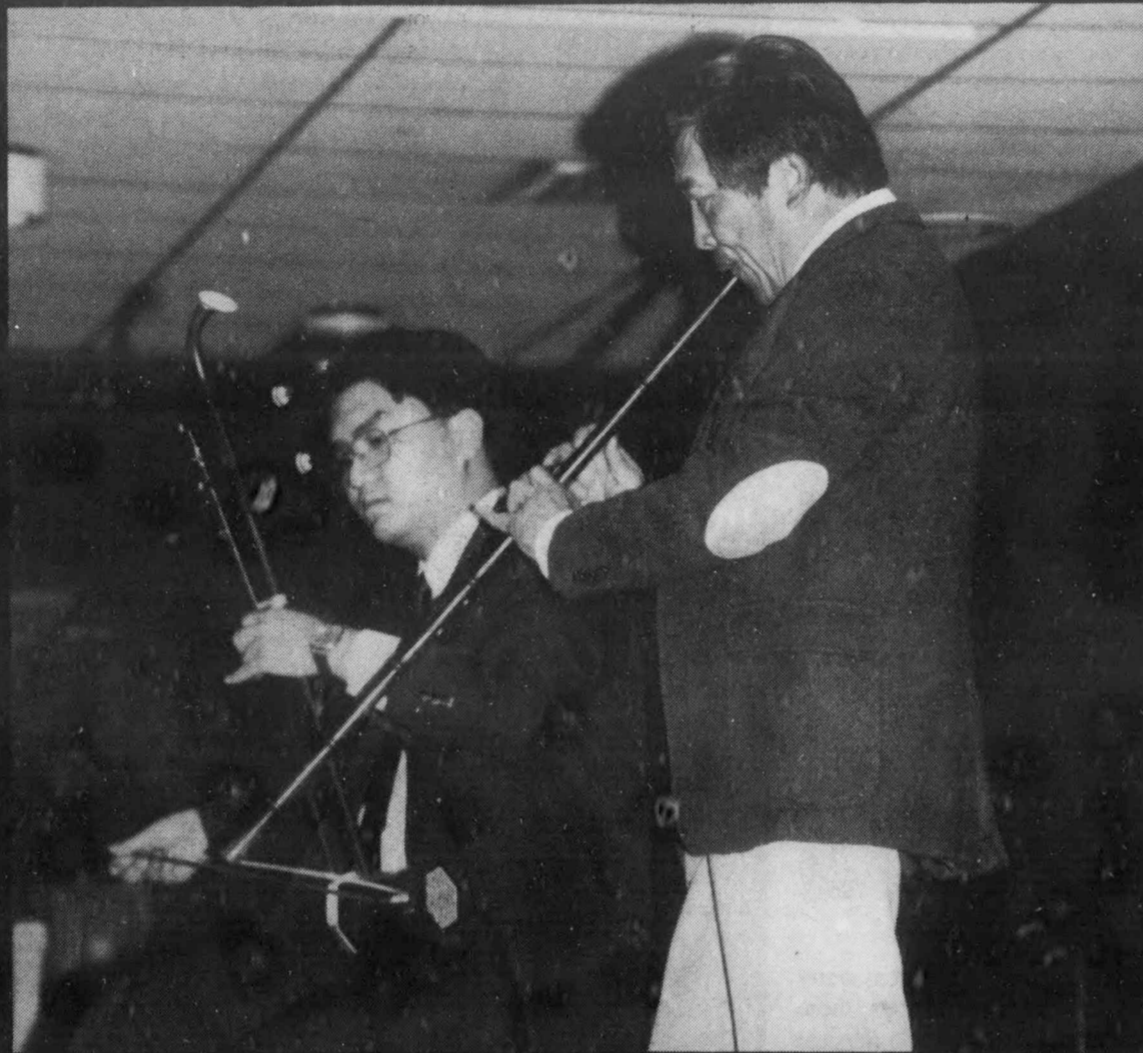
# Entertainment

## Surprising Singapore

The Singapore Students' Association decided to give this year's cultural extravaganza the catchy name "Surprising Singapore". In retrospect, the choice couldn't have been more appropriate.

Natasha Rodriguez, this year's SSA president, was already rushing around campus at the beginning of September preparing for the annual event. Natasha spent the better part of the past month plastering "Surprising Singapore" posters over high-visibility locations. I got my first surprise when I noticed the resemblance between the huge purple orchid decorating the posters and a certain series of watercolours by artist Georgia O'Keefe. Unfortunately, my cultural awareness doesn't go far beyond such artsie trivia, so I found an event like Surprising Singapore worth much more than the ticket price (absolutely free, since I work for the Bruns-recruitment plug).

The turnout was everything the organizers could have hoped for, with an enthusiastic crowd filling the SUB cafeteria to capacity. It was nice to see a lot of students there (including a handful towed up the hill from residence by our neighbour, Natasha). I think I noticed more older people in the audience at last year's Singapore event, but the huge crowd at this year's probably lowered the average age.



In previous years, an exhibit on Singapore was held in the SUB Blue Lounge with a noon-hour show. In my opinion, the evening schedule is a welcome change. Since guests began the evening with a sit-down meal, they were relaxed and ready to enjoy the concert afterwards without the constant interruptions by curious people wandering through.

Dinner was served in generous and delicious portions (with seconds!) and managed to find that difficult balance between spicy and sweet items needed to please both Canadian and native Asian tastes.

Aurelius Gordon, unofficial cultural ambassador for UNB's Caribbean community, was the surprise MC. Apparently, the SSA networks with other cultural organizations at UNB as well as Singaporeans interact

with the diverse cultural groups in their homeland.

Kay Nandlall, International Student Advisor and Guest of Honour, gave an informative speech about Singapore's history before the concert. Singapore's rapid development from resource-poor British colony to economic dynamo is truly amazing when it's contrasted to less fortunate nations of similar backgrounds.

In case anyone was wondering what cultural price might have been paid for such economic success, the opening part of the concert proved that modernization has not meant abandoning Singapore's heritage. The Malay Welcome Dance was a charming routine with unexpected liveliness punctuating it. It was followed by a comical, and very well-performed, parody of In-

dian romantic movies done to the song "Mustapha". The song itself is a mixture of traditional Indian sounds and a contemporary dance beat and was a good choice to set a fun tone to the concert. That was followed by an instrumental prelude with traditional Chinese instruments and melodies. Again, a traditional performance was followed by a contemporary one, this time a modern dance set to Janet Jackson's (surprise!) "Rhythm Nation". Then came another traditional number, a Eurasian dance (Jinkli Nona), with a noticeable Portuguese influence on costume and style.

The mixture of traditional and modern performances might have seemed discordant if it weren't for the fact that the traditional and the modern exist side by side as an everyday reality in

the Singapore of today. I also found it fascinating to see the similarities and differences between the traditional performances representing the major ethnic groups of Singapore—the Chinese, the Malay, the Eurasian and the Indian.

Surprising Singapore's second half included a rousing Indian dance (Rukamani) and an elaborate, ballet-like Chinese dance. The Accidental Tourists (Singapore Style) was a skit that gave all of us cafeteria-chair tourists a look at the sites of Singapore as the SSA recreated them. The grand finale had everyone in the SSA up on stage dancing through the "streets of Singapore" to the song "Fried Rice Paradise," and the choreography went off without a hitch.

For anyone (like me, for example) with vague ideas about what life in modern Asia is like, Surprising Singapore couldn't have been more enlightening or entertaining. And it was all the more impressive because of its scope and ambition and it still went off smoothly and professionally. If Singapore's only resource is its people, and they have more where the SSA came from, Singapore is bound to have more surprises in store for the world.

by  
*MC*