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Passion for playing piano

THERE is a tendency among piano students to cease learning once they have obtained Grade 8, considered the highest in the field.

However, if you are truly passionate, the learning just never stops.

"To me, obtaining the grades is important in the sense that they form your basic tools. Once you have the basics, it is easier to branch out into like chamber music, solo performances, conducting, anything to make yourself more complete as a musician," said Anastasia Abu Bakar.

"When I started taking piano lessons, I was very `green'. I started at Yamaha Music School at the age of four and went under the tutelage of Professor Snezana Panovska when I turned six."

Anastasia is a 15-year-old student of Sri Cempaka school in Damansara, Petaling Jaya who has been selected to play for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad when he launches an art exhibition at Menara Maybank in Kuala Lumpur on Wednesday.

Having played in most cities in Malaysia as well as China, Anastasia's first public performance was in the presence of the Yang di-Pertuan Agong and his consort in 1995.

She has taken part in many concerts, including the first International Young Pianists Concert in Kuala Lumpur in 1997 and the International Young Virtuosity Piano Forte Concerts in 1999.

In July 2001, Anastasia, and six other young pianists from Malaysia, were invited to perform in a joint concert with students of the famed Shenzhen Arts School in China, including Li Yundi, gold medalist in the prestigious F. Chopin International competition in 2000.

"Playing classical music is quite demanding. There is a lot to think about, not just the notes. When you play someone's composition, it is your duty to interpret his music in the best way you can. I always try to put myself in his shoes, to try and understand what he was actually feeling at the time he wrote his music and why he wrote it," Anastasia said.

Asked if classical music was well-received in Malaysia, Anastasia, a member of the Chopin Society in Malaysia, said it was to a certain extent.

"Since the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra was established, I think the situation has improved a little."

Meanwhile, the Chopin Society in Malaysia is inviting more pianists to apply for membership.

"CSM was formed because the time has come for Malaysia to develop in the field of classical music and to promote the Malaysian talent. Young talents should be given better opportunities to perform," said its vice-president, Datin Halimah Mohd Said.

"By joining the international network of Chopin Societies, we will have the opportunity to interact with class musicians all over the world,"