



This latest offering from the ecNewsdesk brings you information about some students who play musical instruments and one magician. In the words of the great philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, *without music, life would be an error.*

Also included is the winning entry from the online writing competition of the ELC's discussion forum.

As usual, all the latest news from all the ELC extra-curricular activities is included.

The next issue, in September, will have the theme **SUMMER**. We would like to hear about what you have done over the summer - work - placement - study - travel - entertainment -

Send your writings and/or photo to [ecNews@polyu.edu.hk](mailto:ecNews@polyu.edu.hk) - we'd love to hear from you!!

## Erhu

When Yin Zhuang (a second year BA Design student, on a three-year scholarship from Shanghai Tong Ji University) took up the erhu, she never dreamed that one day she would be sitting on the streets of a European capital playing for money.

For those who aren't sure, the erhu is the Chinese orchestra's equivalent of the Western violin. It has two strings and a small hollow box made of wood, with a piece of snakeskin covering one side. It is played with a bow, and the strings and snakeskin cause vibrations which resonate through the box and create music.

The erhu's origins are obscure, but it is descended from the bowed instruments that became popular during the Sung dynasty (960 - 1279 AD). You can often see one being played on the footbridge between our University and Hung Hom station.

Yin Zhuang had been playing for three years when she and her father went to visit

some members of their family in Denmark. She knew that a cultural festival was taking place, so she took her 'Chinese violin' along. However, the foreign adventure got off to a disastrous start when all their money was stolen. Yin Zhuang felt terrible, but she was determined to make up for the loss. With the encouragement of her father she found a spot on a busy street, took out the erhu and started to play.

The Danish people were fascinated and began to drop coins into her case. At first she thought she might earn enough to compensate for the loss of the money, and have a little extra for ice creams. But the coins kept falling and Yin Zhuang kept playing. She played for two months and made enough to cover their expenses and buy two return tickets so that she and her father could make another trip. Unfortunately, we don't know how many ice creams she ate during her musical holiday because she lost count!

## Balalaika by ELC teacher Svetlana Chigaeva

When I first came to Hong Kong, my most immediate impression was that almost everyone knew about the Russian borsch (the red soup served in most student canteens on campus) and about the Russian Balalaika (the restaurant on Knutsford Terrace, Tsim Sha Tsui). Not many people, however, knew what borsch was made of and what "balalaika" really meant. We will leave borsch till later times, but in this article we will look at the history of the balalaika and at its modern-day use.

Balalaika (pronounced as /ba-la-`lai-ka/) is one of the most widely known Russian musical instruments. Triangular in shape and equipped with three strings, it produces sounds similar to those of a mandolin. Different theories exist as to the origins of the instrument. According to the most commonly accepted theory, the balalaika developed from an Oriental instrument brought into Russia by the Mongols during the Golden Horde invasion. This instrument was round in shape and had a long neck. Many other folk instruments developed from this common instrument, some of which are the Persian *sitar* and the Turkish *saz*.

In the Russian historical accounts, the balalaika is recorded as the instrument of the *schomorochs*, musical comedians who, like Shakespearean jesters, could make fun of the tsar (the Russian king), the church, and the political establishments. According to some accounts, playing the balalaika was even banned because it was associated with the *schomorochs*.

The balalaika was also banned during the reign of the tsar Alexei Mikhailovich, who, according to some sources, disliked everything Russian about Russia. In 1648 he issued an order according to which all Russian folk instruments had to be collected from peasants and burned. Those who disobeyed and continued playing those instruments were exiled to the west, the Ukraine.

The modern-day balalaika owes its existence to the nobleman Vasiliy Vasilevich Andrejev. It was Vasiliy Vasilevich who in the 19th century developed various balalaika sizes and arranged various folk as well as classical musical pieces for the balalaika. Many Russian folk songs today are accompanied by traditional orchestras which, along with balalaikas, include *guslis*, *bayans*, and *domras*.

People of my generation remember the balalaika as a symbol of Russia because of its role in movies and cartoons as well as school concerts and performances. If you want to hear the sounds of the balalaika in Hong Kong, visit Balalaika, the Russian restaurant on Knutsford Terrace, and join the others in a dance of *kadril*.

## Dreaming of Music: An interview with a trumpet player

Did you know that in ancient Egypt trumpets were considered sacred and were only used in worship ceremonies? Did you know that a musical instrument resembling the modern-day trumpet was found in China as early as 2000 B.C.? Did you know that the trumpet was mentioned in the Bible as well as Greek and Roman mythology? Did you know that the trumpet had a central communication role in medieval armies?

I didn't. I learned a lot about the trumpet thanks to the interview with Jackie Leung, a first-year student of Biomedical Sciences and an ardent trumpet player. Jackie's initial interest in the trumpet was driven by practical rather than aesthetic purposes. To get into a good secondary school, he needed to excel in non-academic activities such as playing a musical instrument. Since playing the piano or the violin was "too common", Jackie decided to learn something more unique - the trumpet, and he has never regretted his choice.

Jackie's musical experiences are tightly connected with the church he and his family attend. This is where he started performing with others (first with the Junior Brass Choir, later graduating into the Adult Brass Choir). This is where he practises for 3-4 hours every Saturday. One of the pieces that Jackie enjoys most, "The Messiah", also carries religious connotations.

In addition to playing with the church choir, Jackie also plays with NeoWinds,

a newly established wind orchestra (neo = new, winds = wind instruments such as trumpets, saxophones, oboes and others). Jackie does not like playing in full orchestras because trumpets often get secondary roles and Jackie would not settle for anything secondary. In NeoWinds, Jackie gets to play a variety of music and in a variety of roles.

When I asked him what kind of advice he would give those students who want to learn to play a musical instrument, Jackie raised four main points:

1. "Practice makes perfect". If wind brass players don't practise for three weeks, he said, they will step back by three months. This is probably true for all kinds of musical instruments. If you are starting your own musical career, make sure you practise a lot. Also make sure that you choose a good place for your practice sessions where nobody would be bothered by your loud attempts and nobody would call the police.

2. "Music is to reveal your own character". Jackie stressed that students should not be afraid to show their emotions when playing an instrument. Developing an emotional side to playing is the hardest part for most musicians, while learning techniques is comparatively easy. In Hong Kong, Jackie said, some schools emphasize the latter and often underestimate the former. He, however, does not agree with this and

thinks that the two aspects should be developed simultaneously. Jackie compared playing music to drinking coffee. If you are a true connoisseur of coffee, then you would be able to taste the sweetness in a cup of bitter coffee. Similarly, the more you play music, the more you can feel through it, the more emotional depth you can find in it.

3. "You should dream of music". Jackie said that learning music is the same as learning foreign languages. Dreaming in a foreign language is considered to be a sign of having mastered the language. The same goes for music.

4. "Parents should support their children". Apparently, most learners of musical instruments go through three stages: excitement --> boredom --> joy. Some students may not be able to overcome the second stage and that's where their parents' support is most crucial. Hong Kong parents should not see music only as a way of getting their students into prestigious secondary schools. They should learn that music is worth their children's time and effort just because it makes life beautiful and enriches human beings.

Jackie's dream is to go to the US for his postgraduate studies where he also wants to study jazz. I really hope he will get to go to the US and that he will never give up his trumpet no matter how busy his life may become in the future.

## Music and Magic: Talented in playing piano and more

Horace Ng Ho Ching, currently doing a Logistics course in the PolyU, is now a piano teacher, the pianist of a Christian Church and a well-known amateur magician. In fact, he has the nickname "Magic".

Horace started developing his music talent much earlier than his magic performing talent. He had his first piano lesson when he was nine, with financial support from his parents.

"Although I was very much intrigued by magic when I was young and wanted very much to train to be a magician, I was not financially sound enough to

make my dream come true until I was 19, when I started teaching piano," he said.

With earnings from giving piano tuitions, Horace had four years of training, after which he started his amateur magician career. His first performances were close-up magic - the category of magic characterized by spectators staying close to the performer and the props employed being normal in size, such as ordinary cards and coins.

More recently, he has switched to parlour magic and stage magic. Parlour magic is suitable for larger

crowds than close-up; props used are usually larger such as jumbo cards and large coins. This category of magic is good for family dinners, company functions and nightclubs usually with an audience of not more than 50 people. Stage magic is performed on stage for very large audiences. Horace has a lot of experience and participated in an Asian magic contest in 2004.

Horace derives satisfaction from playing piano for the church choir, teaching piano, and from entertaining the magic audience by triggering a sense of awe in them: some children, for example, thought that he really had



super power when he was bending a silver spoon by magic.

Horace values his achievement in both areas and wishes to further develop them. It will be fantastic if he attempts some novel performances with music and magic integrated.

*It's easy to play any musical instrument:*

*all you have to do is touch the right key at the right time and the instrument will play itself.*

J.S. Bach

## Debate Chatroom

The initial aim of the Debate Chatroom was to organize online debate contests for PolyU students. Three contests were organized last semester. The photo shows three of the six winners of these contests.

Recently, the Debate Chatroom has set up a discussion forum to provide PolyU students with an opportunity to express their views on controversial topics in order to improve their writing and analytical skills. One online writing competition was organized this semester. The winners are Poon Cho Wing and Carina Ng Tze Yin. Poon Cho Wing's article is below. You can read other articles on our website: <http://dev.elc.polyu.edu.hk/dchat/forum/index.asp>.



Three winners

## ELC Reading Group update

Have you read any good books recently? Members of the ELC Reading Group have been reading different kinds of books, both fiction and non-fiction. They are not only reading but also meeting regularly with other members and ELC teachers. Over the past few semesters, ELC Reading Group has increased in popularity as members meet to share their thoughts, turning the solitary pleasure of reading into a stimulating discussion. Many members find their reading becomes more rewarding, and that an exchange of ideas with others provides a good opportunity to practise their English skills. To find out more about the Reading Group, please visit our web site at <http://elc.polyu.edu.hk/readgroup>

## Discussion Forum - The first online writing competition

The following article was voted the best entry on the topic:

Hong Kong should model itself on Singapore in promoting large families.

Poon Cho Wing Facing the fact or siding the symptoms?

The prizes for each online writing competition winner are a book voucher for \$100 and a transcript.

The practice of conducting studies and reviewing foreign examples about what can (and should) be done in certain policy areas has almost become a fashion and ritual of the HKSAR government in dealing with different social and political issues. There is little doubt that such endeavor can bring about new insights about what policy options are available and their respective strengths and pitfalls. Yet, it would be far too arbitrary if we evaluate the potential merits and demerits of such alternatives without taking imperative factors such as the differences and variations in culture, ideology and socio-economic background into consideration.

Declining fertility is not only a "problem" facing Hong Kong but the rest of the world. What matters is not the symptom itself but the implications for such occurrence. We cannot tell whether Hong Kong should model itself on Singapore before we come to differentiate the reasons account for the low birth rates in the two places.

Population control policies reflect the dominant, but daunting ideology commonly shared in Singapore. The first one is elitism as when only individuals with a sound education and socio-economic background are encouraged to have babies. The second, I would say, is a kind of extended capitalism as when people come to acquire the faith that only things with "profitable returns" are of worth to be done. Being pathetic but true, such "philosophy" overwhelms even the family policy in Singapore with her people being permissive under the authoritarian control of the government.

If our government is determined to follow such kind of restrictive plicy that increasingly blurs the boundary between the public and the private spheres with the former dominates, will it merely serve as a confession of the poor fact that Hong Kong shares the same philosophy as Singapore's without really tackling the origins of our sickness?

## Musical Instrument Quiz

Do you know the names of these musical instruments?  
Match the pictures with the names.

Banjo	Harmonica
Trombone	Balalaika (a)
Erhu	Mandolin
Maracas	Saxophone

You can find the answers on the ecNews website:  
<http://elc.polyu.edu.hk/ecNews>



*If you can walk you can dance. If you can talk you can sing.*  
Proverb from Zimbabwe

## BRICKERS' singing contest

Brickers, the ELC band, organised a singing contest for the second year running.

The final of the contest was held on 24 March on the podium. This year there were eight contestants in the final and three were chosen to sing a second song to decide the winner. Finally, the judges chose Ian Leung Wai Lin as the winner. His two winning songs were She's The One by Robbie Williams and The Long Goodbye by Ronan Keating. Ian likes these singers because they both have unique and expressive voices. He also likes Diane Reeve because of her 'sexy voice', he said.

Ian also likes acting. He's in a Cantonese drama at the Sheung Wan Civic Centre on 24 and 25 April.



## PIFS

During this semester, the PolyU International Film Society (PIFS) in keeping to its objectives, has brought five great films from different countries, all of which have shown different cultures and ethnic values to its members. Having had an audience of over ninety for our last screening, Bad Education, the film society has won its fame and recognition from not only Hong Kong students, but also from exchange students. These students regularly visit our fortnightly film shows, and help to make our discussion sessions after each screenings more vibrant. In order to benefit more students, PIFS will arrange more activities such as O'Nights and joint society activities, and continue to provide a free buffet to participants. The film society also has a library of an extensive collection of superb films at your disposal. Members can now get access to our new library which is located in CILL.

For more information about PIFS and our events, visit:  
<http://elc.polyu.edu.hk/filmsociety>

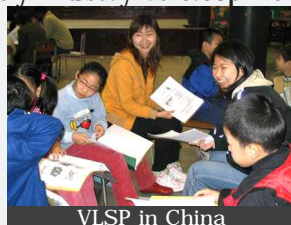


## English Club

In its continued efforts to offer Polyu students an opportunity to improve in their use of English, the club organised various activities in semester two. High on the agenda was the English Speaking Workshop for primary three students at Fish Primary school, which was a great success.

As usual, the Big Mouth Corner, held every Thursday at 6:30pm on EF podium, continued to offer students a chance to chat in English and exchange cultural values with young people from all five continents. The club finished the semester-two activities with Hockey Sports Day and ushering in the new Executive Committee for the year 2005-2006.

This summer, the club will be in Mainland China on the Voluntary Language Speaking Program (VLSP). These programs offer Polyu students a chance to go and share their English-speaking with primary school students and teachers in mainland China. For further details visit <http://elc.polyu.edu.hk/englishclub>



## English Award Scheme

We received a total of 26 portfolios. We enjoyed looking at them and it was obvious that the candidates had put a big effort into improving their English in a variety of ways outside the formal classroom setting. They illustrated their portfolios with colourful 'evidence' such as brochures, movie tickets, photos and newspaper articles. The 15 finalists were the ones who put the most work into their self-study, showed the work they had done and were able to reflect on their progress.

We will be inviting the finalists for interviews soon. 10 lucky winners will be chosen !

Good Luck !

The EAS Committee

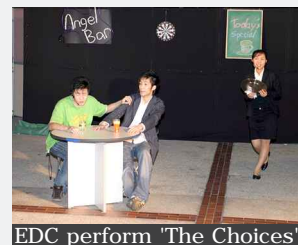
## EDC makes the night wild



On 1 April 2005, the English Drama Club performed yet another hotshot drama entitled "The Choices". This student-produced love comedy draws on influences such as the work of Oscar Wilde. Two young lads in a bar one night hit on a plan to lure the girls by pretending to be a famous love story writer, but in the end the girls discover their deceptions.

The play evidently appealed strongly to its audience. The evening outdoor performance attracted a large number of campus-crossers to top the already filled seats, and questionnaire responses to the event were very positive. The evening was memorable and enjoyable as the action created amusement, laughter and a relaxed mood.

The English Drama Club has developed appreciably since its beginnings in 2002, with a number of successes such as "Death Angel" (November 2004) and "Reality" (March 2004). The Club is also a creative means of reinforcing and extending students' English language skills.



## CILL

You can still come to CILL !!

During the summer break CILL will be open as normal.

You will be able to sign up for IELTS preparation courses, and Grammar, Vocabulary and Pronunciation mini-courses.

As usual, you will also be able to attend our Summer Workshops. These will be on a whole variety of interesting topics, chosen by our ELC teachers.

There will also be some Writing Assistance Programme (WAP) and Speaking Assistance Programme (SAP) sessions available.

Look out for the notices in CILL, A305 !

