

## **Speech**

### **Reception for the Australian Alumni Gala Concert**

**October 4, 2025, YST Conservatory, National University of Singapore**

- Good evening and thank you Peter,
  - To our host this evening, Yong Siew Toh Conservatory Dean, Professor Peter Tornquist
  - Associate Professor Luke Dollman of Elder Conservatory, the University of Adelaide
  - Commanding Officer RAAF Band Squadron Leader Daniel Philips
  - SAF Brigadier-General Chua Eng Khim, Commander of 2nd People's Defence Force Command and Island Defence Task Force
  - University of Adelaide the Honorable Catherine Branson
  - Uni SA Chancellor the Honorable John Hill
  - University of Adelaide Deputy Vice Chancellor Professor Jessica Gallagher
  - Australian Alumni Singapore President Mr Andrew Er
  - Distinguished Guests, Alumni, Ladies and Gentlemen
- Welcome to this evening's Gala Concert dedicated to the over 200,000 Alumni of Australian Universities here in Singapore who are the backbone of the strong people-to-people connection between Australia and Singapore over more than 60 years; indeed the Australian Alumni Singapore (the AAS), headed up by Andrew Er is celebrating 70 years in 2025.
- This evening also launches our 60th Anniversary month of Connection and Culture — a celebration alive with music, dance, theatre, visual arts, visits and exchanges between the two nations.
- This month of October 2025 represents the crescendo of our programming of activities to mark the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Singapore's independence and our bilateral relationship. What's more over the coming weeks, we will also celebrate deep cultural traditions from the Mid-Autumn Festival next week to Deepavali, later in the month, weaving together the diverse threads of our shared cultural tapestry here in Singapore.
- Tonight is more than a gala. It is a celebration of the symphony both nations and peoples have composed together – and no people more than our alumni in Singapore. For decades now, our alumni have set the tempo across government, business, trade, health, and education and many other professional fields — and this evening, our spotlight shines on the creative arts.
- The idea for this event originated just over two years ago after I attended an excellent concert here – a collaboration between students for YST and Elder led by conductors Luke Dollman with Lien Boon Hua and Tony Makarome of YST with Grayson Rotumah of Elder, a Bundjalang man from northern NSW playing a distinctive Yolngu didgeridoo.
- That collaboration inspired me to think about the connections between Adelaide University and Dr Tony Tan – an alumnus of Adelaide and YST Conservatory which he first envisaged in the late 1990s as Deputy Prime Minister after having been the first Vice Chancellor of NUS in the

early 1980s. Those connections from decades ago until today symbolized the significance and depth of the alumni connections between Singapore and Australia.

- And so I asked Luke to consider whether a concert like this, with an original new composition by a graduate composer from Elder might be possible. He discussed it with Peter who agreed – and so tonight’s event was born, with the new composition commissioned by the Australian High Commission to celebrate the connections “Threads” composed by Connor Fogarty of Elder – the world premiere of which will to be performed conducted by Luke together with other innovative works from Australia and Singaporean composers and musicians.
- Connor’s inspiration came from the idea of human connection — the invisible threads that weave together individuals, communities, and cultures. In this concerto for fifteen musicians, you will hear voices emerging in dialogue, sometimes in contrast, sometimes in harmony — much like the relationships that bind us together. Connor’s works have been performed across Australia by leading ensembles and soloists, and it is a privilege to have his music premiere here in Singapore tonight.
- And, of course, the alumni connection goes well beyond Adelaide extending to all or most of our 40 plus Australian universities and Singapore partners.
- That’s why we are especially delighted to present a unique collaboration involving musicians and collaborators in addition to Adelaide, from Griffith University/ Queensland Conservatorium and the University of Melbourne Conservatorium, performing alongside the Singapore Armed Forces Central Band, the Royal Australian Air Force Band, and the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory here at NUS. Together, they have orchestrated a performance that resonates with our shared history and harmonious growth over the past six decades.
- As you can tell also, this collaboration exemplifies the enduring and multifaceted defence partnership between Australia and Singapore. It is a privilege to witness members of the Royal Australian Air Force Band and the Singapore Armed Forces Band performing side by side this evening—a powerful symbol of our close defence cooperation.
- These strong bonds will be further reinforced next week, when our leaders meet in Australia for the 10th Annual Leaders’ Meeting. There, they will sign a new second phase Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Notably, the first pillar of this agreement will focus on deepening our defence relationship—highlighting how our nations continue to train, learn, and safeguard together. While the fifth pillar is focused on deepening people-to-people connections, including through collaboration in culture, the arts and education - and that is what we are doing here tonight!
- Of course, evenings like this would not be possible without our partners. A heartfelt thank you to our 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary Diamond sponsors — Australian International School, BHP, Curtin University, James Cook University, Murdoch University, Santos, the University of Newcastle, and Westpac — for your generous support throughout this anniversary year.

- As we strike a new note tonight, may the music inspire Australia and Singapore to continue to work together in harmony for many years to come.
- Thank you, and please enjoy the concert.