

# BLOOD SWEAT AND TEARS YOUTH FESTIVAL

SHERYL QUEK brings you the highlights of the nation's biggest performing arts competition

As schools' focus away from awards has not diminished the competitive spirit of the participants at this year's Singapore Youth Festival (SYF).

The pressure to perform is still there, say students, who regard the SYF as one of the nation's most prestigious competitions for the performing arts.

Preparation for the 47th edition still demands blood, sweat and tears — despite the new grading system.

Instead of the customary gold with honours, silver and bronze standards, participants will now be awarded distinction, accomplishment and commendation certificates.

Denisha Dhillon, 16, a Sec 4 student at Northbrooks Secondary who participated in the international dance category, said: "Regardless of whether the grading criteria has changed, we still had to put in a lot of effort."

Echoing Denisha's view is Yio Chu Kang Secondary's Jovetta Tan, 16, whose school participated in the drama category.

"I do not think the change in the grading structure for SYF has changed the amount of pressure students feel when performing," she said.

become the platform for students from primary and secondary schools, junior colleges and centralised institutes to showcase their talents in a wide range of performing arts categories including choir, drama, dance and band.

Students will perform before a judging panel in the segment of the festival called the SYF Arts Presentation which is taking place this month and next month. This will wrap up with a five-day celebration in July. Subsequently, their performances are benchmarked against other schools in their respective categories.

While the new grading system is designed to be less exacting than before, it has driven some schools to push their students harder to ensure they snag distinctions.

Teo Sze-Anne, 15, a Secondary 3 student from Crescent Girls' School, feels that if anything, the new grading system increases the pressure on students.

Said the SYF participant and member of her school's vocal ensemble: "A few of my friends feel that the instructors made us work harder because they think the change in the grading system

In addition to the twice weekly practices for the SYF, the SYF vocal ensemble was also required to have choral training sessions "as often as possible".

However, as much as distinctions drive schools to perform at the SYF, some students such as Lim Fang Hui, 14, feel that it is more than just about the awards.

The Sec 3 student of Regent Secondary, who participated in the international dance category, said the new grading system did not make much of a difference.

"We still felt the pressure because SYF is such a huge competition with so many schools participating," said Fang Hui.

"When we entered the competition, we were not targeting any awards, but to do our best and learn as much as possible from the other schools."

**f DID THE CHANGE IN SYF'S GRADING CRITERIA PUT MORE PRESSURE ON YOUR GROUP? Tell us at [www.facebook.com/innies](http://www.facebook.com/innies).**



PHOTOS ON THE LEFT: Instead of using a known play, Yio Chu Kang Secondary's drama group went with a more experimental piece largely devised by its students.

Called *Contrology*, the piece is a series of vignettes that centres on the theme of rebellion and control. Said its teacher-in-charge of the drama group, Miss Sin Puay San: "There are 20 students onstage simultaneously most of the time. This increased the difficulty level of the play's execution."



ABOVE: Props were a key part of this rhythmic percussion-like modern dance piece by Raffles Girls' Secondary School, called *Young Ones, Once*. Year 4 student Cheong Ka Xin, 16, a participant and chairman of her school's dance international co-curricular activity, said: "We had quite a bit of logistics work to prepare for, for instance, sewing ribbons onto each costume, ..."

LEFT AND RIGHT: Riverside Secondary School's sombre war-time-themed piece, *In The Frontline*, tested both the dancers' physical and emotional stamina. Jasmine Goh, 14, a Sec 2 participant, said: "This dance is very unique as we had to dance emotionally. It was a very sad dance that is supposed to tell the audience what war is like. "We had to try our best to cry and dance for this performance, which was the hardest thing to do."

LEFT: Dancers from River Valley High, sitting fast food and touching up their make-up before their turn onstage. Like Riverside Secondary, their piece, *Lumen*, is driven by a storyline.

ABOVE, LEFT AND RIGHT: After their performances, dancers from the different schools could be seen posing for pictures outside the auditorium at the University Cultural Centre where the presentation for the international dance category was held.

ABOVE: Pioneer Secondary with their performance *All That Jazzes* is Gold for the international dance category in SYF 2013. The upbeat piece is based on the song *All That Jazz* from the musical *Chicago*.