

**Speech by NUS President Professor Tan Eng Chye
at the unveiling of the upgraded University Cultural Centre
Thursday 22 March 2018, 4 pm, Atrium, UCC**

Distinguished Guests, Colleagues, Alumni and Students

I am very pleased to join you this afternoon, to celebrate the reopening of a very special building at the cultural heart of NUS, that is, the University Cultural Centre, or UCC.

The UCC, alongside the NUS Museum, the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music and the Lee Kong Chian Natural History Museum, forms a ‘cultural cluster’ on the west side of campus. This cultural wing brings so much to both NUS and the wider Singapore community. From young artists who step on to the main stage for the first time, to researchers who draw inspiration from the artefacts at the museums, to visitors who come from across the island (or the world) to get a taste of Singapore’s cultural identity; this cluster is both a source, and a stage, for ideas.

The University Cultural Centre was first opened at the turn of the century. Since then, I’ve had the pleasure of attending numerous events in various capacities. I always marvel at how a single building can capture so much of the spirit, journey and ambition of NUS.

The NUS community associates the UCC as a place where one celebrates significant milestones in the academic journey. The UCC is certainly a shared experience that unites each of our young alumni, as this is where Commencement is held; the graduation experience is something to which current and future generations of students aspire towards.

The UCC is also the stage where key historical moments of our University have taken place. This is where we honour our highest achievers at the University Awards. It is a place of prestige that has hosted the great thinkers and luminaries of global politics, art and culture. Heads of State, Nobel Laureates and Pulitzer Prize winners have all told their stories within these walls.

The UCC has hosted many grand occasions and exceptional people. But the value of the UCC to the NUS community, goes beyond these signature events. The UCC enriches the NUS community through the **opportunities** this venue creates for our students to discover, develop and grow.

When the UCC was first opened nearly eighteen years ago, (then) Minister for Education, Dr Tony Tan said “The cultivation of the arts requires not only creativity and imagination, but also discipline, perseverance and, often, teamwork. The UCC is therefore more than just an impressive venue for performances and other university events. It is also a symbolic affirmation of the significant place these laudable qualities have within a university community of learners, scholars and researchers.”

Much has changed in the years since, but the benefits of incorporating the arts in education have become increasingly clear. Let me share how the arts have impacted the lives and work of two great men.

First, Albert Einstein, the most influential physicist of the 20th century who developed the theory of relativity. Einstein loved classical music. He said, ‘I live my daydreams in music. I see my life in terms of music. I get most joy in life out of music.’ Music helped Einstein to solve problems. When Einstein was having trouble with a scientific theory, he would pick up his violin, which he named Lina, and play, and it would often lead to a constructive thought. Einstein stressed the importance of creativity, once saying, ‘I’m enough of an artist to draw freely on my imagination, which I think is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.’ Logic will get you from A to Z; imagination will get you everywhere.

The late Steve Jobs, co-founder and former CEO of Apple, also acutely appreciated the role that the arts play in our lives, and in the commercial world. He insisted that computer scientists must work together with artists and designers —that the best ideas emerge from the intersection of technology and the arts. In 2010, while introducing the iPad, Steve Jobs said “It’s in Apple’s DNA that technology alone is not enough. It’s technology married with liberal arts, married with the humanities, that yields the results that make our hearts sing.”

The arts and humanities play an important role in our education mission to prepare our students to thrive and ride opportunities in this rapidly changing world. Deep mastery of a single discipline no longer suffices. Beyond disciplinary competence, companies and organizations want employees who are creative, resourceful, who can think critically, and are able to communicate well and collaborate with others. The world is diverse and complex – our students must be able to work across perceived boundaries, to leverage diversity and foster new ideas. All these are skills that can blossom through engagement with the arts. These qualities are precisely at the heart of staging a play or performing in an ensemble or

orchestra. Like the liberal arts, training in the arts improves our ability to pull together and coalesce seemingly disparate ideas and information into a meaningful whole.

As leaders, our role is to help create opportunities, provide the infrastructure and develop the platforms and networks that will see our students, past and present, flourish, bringing positive impact to society.

The UCC is the cultural heart of NUS. It is a place where students find their voice. For some this will be as professional artists, but for many others, this will be as confident, resourceful global citizens, who are able to appreciate and harness the power of the arts, in their personal lives and in whatever careers they choose.

I am also pleased to share that structurally, the NUS Centre For the Arts or CFA is now part of the academic cluster, under the purview of the Senior Deputy President and Provost. Together with the UCC, CFA and UCC will support our enduring educational philosophy of nurturing well-rounded individuals who can appreciate and straddle across disciplines and express themselves persuasively.

On this note, I would like to commend the Centre for the Arts, the Office of Facilities Management under University Campus Infrastructure, as well as individual colleagues who have contributed to the successful completion of this upgrading project. Much has gone on behind the scenes, and it is a team effort. I also thank our partners, Forum Architects and contractor, Gennal, for their expeditious project delivery.

Ladies and gentlemen, I'm very proud to present to you, this newly upgraded University Cultural Centre. I look forward to the stories that this venue will help tell. There will be great performances and major events, but most of all, I hope the University Cultural Centre will be part of the precious memories and experiences of every NUS staff, student and alumni.

Thank you.