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Five-time Performing Artist of the Year judge, Karly Cox, explains why the panel will be assessing how candidates use their unique crafts to connect with and ‘heal’ the audience, writes **Veronica Lin**

Bringing joy to our busy world

Performing arts is a rare treat in Hong Kong, especially considering all shows have been cancelled or postponed due to the Covid-19 outbreak.

We spoke to veteran Student of the Year judge and familiar face Karly Cox, Deputy Editor of *Young Post*, about what she is looking for in this year’s Performing Artist of the Year winner, and any advice for budding artists who want to make it in the city.

Judging the category for the fifth time, Cox says she is always blown away by the range of talent in the final rounds of the competition.

“All of the students we see and hear are incredible performers. It is both an honour to witness their auditions, and an absolutely nerve-racking process to decide on the top three,” says Cox.

However, skills alone is not enough – it is also about what the performance provides the audience.

“[Qualities I’m looking for in the winner include] a love not just for their craft, but of bringing their craft to other people, to bring them joy,” she explains.

“A passionate conviction that the arts can heal, bring people together, and, as cheesy as it

sounds, make the world a better place,” she says.

So if there are two similarly skilled candidates, how would Cox choose between them? It all comes down to their interviews and their ability to “express or use their skills to benefit others, and what their art can do for the good of society”.

To ace your interview, Cox says the number one rule is to “relax”.

“Don’t stress out about your performance! All three of us judges are obviously massive fans of the arts. We just want to see you do your thing,” she says.

“Enjoy the experience, relax into it, show us what you’ve got. Don’t worry about making mistakes – this isn’t an exam,” she adds.

“I’d much rather see a dancer fall and pick themselves up again and carry on with a smile,

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day job. However, Cox thinks it is important to both “face facts” but also “find a way to bring joy to people” when doing what you love.

“Being a professional performer is a tough gig – pun intended. It takes commitment, dedication, and, to be blunt, money. You need to pay the bills, and if you’re a gigging artist, you’re not going to rolling in cash,” she says.

“But for every Lang Lang, there are thousands of young artists whose names will never be of the household variety,” she explains.

“It’s unlikely you’ll make a lot of money as a full-time artist in Hong Kong. But if it’s what you truly want to do, you will find a way, and you will bring joy to a lot of people, not least yourself.”

The Student of the Year Awards competition is organised by South China Morning Post and Young Post and sponsored by the Hong Kong Jockey Club

or hear a pianist stumble through a passage but laugh it off afterwards, than sit through a perfect, though robotic and ultimately soulless rendition.”

As a seasoned stage manager who has worked with groups such as The Hong Kong Singers since high school, here are the top tips Cox has learned over the years. “The most important lessons,” she says, “are to listen to each other, and ask if you don’t know. Obviously this applies to all careers, and all areas of life, but when you’re operating in the literal dark of backstage, it’s the best advice!”

Most Hong Kong performers can only afford to pursue their passion as a secondary to their

The South China Morning Post and The Hong Kong Jockey Club are proud to present the Student of the Year Awards, now in their 39th year.

The Awards continue to be a prestigious annual event recognising the achievements of secondary school students and their contributions to school and the betterment of our society.

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