

Disabled teen wows crowd on marimba

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KUANTAN: A 17-year-old Japanese girl with Down Syndrome is wowing the crowd with her marimba.

Sayuri Shirai, who after years of training with the marimba, is able to perform at corporate functions.

Marimba is a percussion instrument consisting of a set of wooden bars struck with mallets to produce musical tones.

Her father Prof Dr Yoshihito Shirai, 58, said he and his wife had tried to develop Sayuri's talents in the arts by enrolling her in a performance group for disabled children about 10 years ago.

"During one of their theatre plays, more than 1,000 people turned up to show their support. It was then that I felt that disabled people can be a part of normal society.

"They can still create value for the community and I wanted to show the public that," he said.

Dr Shirai, who is the director of the Kyushu Institute of Technology Malaysia Super Satellite Campus in Universiti Putra Malaysia, said Sayuri started showing her talent in the marimba about four years ago.

"We engaged a professional marimba teacher to bring out her talent. We felt that music as a form of therapy can be useful for the intellectually disabled," he said.

Dr Shirai said it was his hope that Sayuri could support herself through music.



Uplifting performance: Sayuri captivating the audience at the Kiwanis Charity Dinner.

"She cannot understand the concept of numbers and with weak limbs, she cannot work in the agricultural sector. There are companies in Japan that employ disabled people but as Sayuri cannot count money, it can be difficult for her to make a living in a regular work environment.

"That is why music is very important for her future," he said.

Dr Shirai also said that in Japan, parents with disabled children do

not attempt to develop their children's talents and abilities.

"It is hard to break the societal trends in Japan and find opportunities for disabled people. It is different in Malaysia though. People here can see, hear and understand the plight of the disabled.

"I find that it is easier in this country for the handicapped to break out of their situation. The community in Malaysia are more accepting," he said, adding that Sayuri had been

invited to perform the *dikir barat* during music sessions in UPM.

Dr Shirai was a speaker on empowering Down Syndrome children through music and arts seminar at the MS Garden Hotel here yesterday.

Other speakers included UPM Faculty of Educational Studies associate professor Dr Samsilah Roslan and UPM ethnomusicology, jazz and music education senior lecturer Dr Chan Cheong Jan.