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Music's power to touch people has kept world-renowned Richard Stoltzman playing his clarinet for five decades, writes **Barry C Chung**



**Blowing hot**

**L**ooking back on his childhood, Richard Stoltzman remembers the exact moment music was no longer just a series of sounds, but a medium of expression. It was the turning point for a kid who would become a world renowned clarinetist.

"When I was little, I played *Silver Threads Among the Gold* for a parent-teacher meeting at a [primary] school," the 68-year-old Stoltzman tells *Young Post*.

"Afterwards, some old lady - she was probably 30 but looked older to me at the time - was crying.

"She came over to me and said: 'Thank you.' At the time I thought: why was she crying? Why did she say thank you to me?"

"Later I realised why: music moves people. It touches them without you even knowing, sometimes. There's something in music

that makes people have really strong feelings. That was when I realised music is very powerful.

"From then on I wanted to stay close to music."

In a career that spans roughly five decades, he has been a soloist in more than 100 orchestras, won two

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Grammy Awards and participated in more than 50 recordings. Not bad for a boy who first picked up the instrument simply because he was curious as to how its parts fitted together. "I was more excited about the clarinet because it had all these different parts, you could put them together and it wasn't too heavy," he recalls. "The first time I played, it was all these squeaky noises. Yeah, the squeaky noises were terrible."

In April, Stoltzman was in Hong Kong to

take part in *The Intimacy of Creativity*, a series of music-related workshops and performances at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, for its 20th anniversary. He performed pieces by composers like Bright Sheng and Yehudi Wyner, his former teacher at Yale.

He also held a lecture titled: "Lost in Translation: Notes Between Composer and Performer", on how a performer interprets a written piece.

"Notation is the composer's idea," Stoltzman says. "It's the composer's dots [musical notes], but when you play them, they're not dots anymore. You need to look at it and think where it will go up, or be the most strong [forceful]."

"As a performer, you need to interpret that - everyone will have a different interpretation."

Stoltzman's creativity doesn't stop with music. He's a Cordon Bleu-trained pastry chef, and sees similarities between the two arts. He says desserts are something you make on your own, "and when you're ready, you bring it to the table and everybody enjoys it.

"Music is a little like that. You don't want people listening to you practising or getting ready.

"Then when you feel you have this piece down, you give it to them in the form of a performance."

Stoltzman feels that music is one of the greatest human achievements, transcending race, gender and time.

"Music is a source of hope for our race," he says. "I want people to be proud of the human race because we've created this universal language. Without the sound of music, I think we would all be really depressed."