

# Lifestyle

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A member of the "Salgueiro" samba school performs during the first night of Rio's Carnival at the Sambadrome in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, early yesterday. — AFP

## Making a splash at Malaysia's mermaid school

Wearing tails made of plastic fins covered by shimmering fabric, five women glided through a pool at a Malaysian centre that teaches people how to swim like mermaids. The academy, in the coastal town of Klang, southwest of Kuala Lumpur, is among several that have sprung up around the world to cater to the growing popularity of swimmers emulating the mythical creatures. The students—wearing bikini tops as well as their mermaid tails—circled underwater and did somersaults, all the time trying to keep their eyes open. "It's quite tough," said Koh Yi

Xuen, who is 27 and has been learning the special swimming technique for about three years. "We have to open our eyes in the water, and our legs are tied up."

Lee Boon Leong said he started offering the lessons at his swimming academy after a company approached him and asked to hire someone who could swim like a mermaid for a product launch. The school, which now has five instructors, has taught about 500 women to swim like mermaids. Lee said it is possible to learn the basics in about 16 hours of classes over three months. Mermaids, which have

the upper body and head of a woman and the tail of a fish, are creatures from folklore. The Disney animated classic "The Little Mermaid", based on the fairy tale by Danish author Hans Christian Andersen, spurred new interest in the creatures and the way they swim in recent years. — AFP



25-year-old Naomi Wong Jiag performing dolphin kicks wearing a mermaid tail.



This picture shows swimmers (from left) Teo Jia Yin, Chan Yushi, Naomi Wong Jiag, Koh Yi Xuen, and Teo Jia Qin posing wearing their mermaid tails before a swim in a pool in Klang, on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur. — AFP photos



Swimmers (From left) twin sisters Teo Jia Yin and Teo Jia Qin, Naomi Wong Jiag, Koh Yi Xuen and Chan Yushi performing, wearing mermaid tails, in a swimming pool in Klang, on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur.



A blind violinist Abie Baker wears a wristband receiving the movement from a specially developed baton which turns them into vibrations.

### 'Haptic baton' offers new hope for blind musicians

A conductor's baton has been created that allows the visually-impaired to follow its movements, opening up the potential for blind people to join more orchestras. The 'Haptic Baton' contains sensors that pick up even slight motions. These are then transmitted via radio signals to vibrating devices attached to musicians' wrists or ankles. They vibrate and buzz in different ways to indicate to the player the pace and dynamics the conductor wants.

Violinist Abie Baker, who went blind as a child due to a cataract operation, said she was confident that with the device she could start playing her instrument at the same time as others. "In the past we've been reliant on hearing sounds around us. So I've been playing in a violin section and I've been reliant on hearing the other musicians putting up their instruments and then guessing roughly when to come in," she told Reuters. "So this is bril-

liant because there's no need to count in or anything. I can literally just feel a buzz or two and then know to come in and I can come in confidently knowing that it's right, which is amazing," she added. When playing as a soloist, blind pianist Kevin Satizabal said he has previously had to sit close to the conductor and listen for their breathing to know when to begin.

"But if you're in a big orchestra and you're miles from the conductor, that's going to be really, really difficult information to pick up and this technology essentially plugs you into the conductor's movements, which is really exciting," he said. "Orchestras won't have any excuse not to hire visually impaired musicians because the technology's right there allowing them to be an integral part," he added.

The Human Instruments device was developed by designer Vahagn Matossian. He was inspired by the 'Beat Buzz' baton which was created by his father, composer Rolf Gehlhaar, in 2017. The 'Haptic Baton' is a prototype being tested with musicians, including the The Paraorchestra and Friends. Its development is ongoing but Matossian hopes it will be available to rent or buy in 2020. — Reuters



Conductor Ewan Campbell uses a specially developed baton which opens up the orchestra to blind musicians, transmitting its movements to vibrating bands worn on violinist Abie Baker's wrist and pianist Kevin Satizabal's ankle in a studio in London.