The "verdict" is in: Beauty pageants are not vacuous and shallow. At least that's the opinion of the 11 finalists for Seventeen magazine's Queen of Queens inter-varsity pageant.

Into its fourth year, the annual pageant brings together pageant winners and finalists from the National University of Singapore, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore Management University and Singapore Institute of Management. It is organised by SPH Magazines.

Shortly before the final showdown that was held at Powerhouse, St James Power Station last night, we asked the girls this: "How are you different from those who take part in the other beauty pageants?"

They gasped and the comments flew. "We've got a sense of who we are," said one. "Who says beauty pageant contestants are bimbotic?" asked another.

Eventually, the girls asked for some time to discuss the question among themselves.

The verdict? Varsity or not, bimbos just don't make the cut in beauty pageant any more.

Nominated representative of the girls, Miss Sarah Low from NUS, said: "In reality, these days, most pageant contestants are degree holders."

And contest or not, insisted the girls, there are no catty feelings amongst them.

In fact, the one thing they loved about being part of the event was the opportunity for them to meet new friends.

It was more a case of a big extended family get-together. Which certainly seemed the case as the 1,000-odd supporters from the four varsities mingled and cheered for their favourite queen-wannabe.

In the end, the title went to Miss Elle Yeow, 21, from SMU. The accountancy and business management undergrad impressed the four-member judge panel with her poise and confidence.

Ms Sasha Gonzales, deputy editor of Seventeen Singapore, added: "She also has a wonderful smile."

Earning Miss Yeow bonus points was her response in the Q&A session.

Ms Gonzales, who was the "mastermind" behind the list of questions, said: "Even I found them a bit 'cheem' (tough). But Elle's answer was well thought of."

 Asked how she contributes to society, Miss Yeow replied: "By contributing to the arts scene."

Every Sunday, she and her 13-member band perform samba music outside Ngee Ann City in Orchard Road, she explained.

An elated Miss Yeow, who was overwhelmed by her victory, told The New Paper on Sunday that the band has been busking for some weeks. "It is something we enjoy, and we provide entertainment not only to fellow Singaporeans but also to tourists," she said.

And yes, her Royal Highness will be there from 3pm to 6pm - just like every other week. "Nothing has changed," she said.