

Media Reviews

Unveiling Beethoven's secrets

Straits Times Mar 2016

Other than the regular airing of his Choral Symphony, Ludwig van Beethoven's late works are hardly ever performed in Singapore. His visionary musical ideas and profundity of thought make these utterances demanding for both performers and audiences alike.

But trust Singaporean violinist Tang Tee Khoon to bring together musical colleagues from around the world and devote two concerts for this just cause.

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From the opening solo in the C-major Sonata, the singing voice of Carr's cello shone like an illuminating source. Never forced or strained, his warmth of tone was a distinguishing feature. Together with Sauer's steadfast and never overpowering partnership, the music soared through Allegro Vivace sections of both movements like a sabre through butter.

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Tang, who plays on the National Arts Council's 1750 J.B. Guadagnini violin, appeared in the second half with Yuki Kasai (2nd violin, Japan), Jessica Thompson (viola, the United States) and Olivia Jeremias (cello, Germany) for Beethoven's String Quartet In E Flat Major Op. 127. Like his other works in the same key, the opening chord was robust and purposeful and the chemistry among the four women in the stirring music became immediately palpable.

The foursome achieved a fine balance. The quiet beginning of the sublime second movement was a case in point: Each individual voice came in clearly and without clamour for limelight - cello, followed by viola, second violin and first violin in that order.

In the ensuing variations, it was Tang's exquisite solos and leadership that lit the way. Yet hers was an intimately wielded authority, to which the group responded with seeming telepathy and utmost musicality.

The light-hearted scherzo jaunted with the sprightliest of pizzicatos, before giving way to an even more animated central section. The finale, which began at an unhurried pace, again exhibited all the qualities that make great chamber music-making, with all four listening intently, reacting and gelling as one. As the tempo quickened towards its final pages, the more acutely these qualities became apparent.

The secrets of late Beethoven were laid bare and lapped up by the most attentive and receptive of audiences. The Tang Tee Khoon Grand Series returns on Dec 2 and 4 with the works of the young Beethoven. On the strength of this latest showing, it should not be missed.

Violinist Tang Tee Khoon and friends Transcend the Ordinary

Straits Times May 2015

When the National Arts Council's prized 1750 J.B. Guadagnini violin was loaned to young Singaporean violinist Tang Tee Khoon some six years ago, one of the conditions was that she performed it regularly here in concert. She has more than fulfilled that role of violin ambassador and now has her own line of recitals called the Tang Tee Khoon Grand Series, featuring guest musicians from around the world.

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This (the Fantasy in C major for violin and piano) is undoubtedly Schubert's most virtuosic work for these two instruments, from its hushed dreamy opening ... to soaring highs ... Tang and her Guadagnini made their entrance, not so much as boldly but sensitively, fully aware of the music's innate poetry.

Playing for almost half an hour, the work traversed peaks and valleys, best exemplified in the central variations on the Schubert's lied *Sei mir gegrusst (I Greet You)* which had all the nuances one could hope for ... The work closed on an exuberant high with the big strides of one of Schubert's most happy melodies.

For the second half, Tang was joined by violinist Yuki Kasai, violist Mariko Hara and cellist Olivia Jeremias, musicians all based in Germany, for Schubert's *String Quartet* in D minor, also known as "*Death And The Maiden*". All the ladies are experienced chamber musicians, and one could tell by their immediacy in the way they launched into its dramatic first movement.

A common sense of purpose united the foursome through the music's heightened tension, and this electricity never flagged in the work's 40 minutes.

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The brief and prickly Scherzo served as a prelude to the finale's furious tarantella rhythm. Here the unison playing in high tempos ... was delivered with stunning accuracy. There was to be no tiring as the quartet raced to a breathless finish, that was greeted by a near-capacity audience with loud acclaim.

From Raw Talent to Mature Virtuoso

Straits Times March 2014

Some items of historical significance may be classified as national treasures. One such treasure is a 1750 J.B. Guadagnini violin, purchased by an institutional benefactor and donated to the National Arts Council in 2000. The instrument has since been lent to Singaporean violinists making their mark in the global scene. It now rests in the deserving hands of 30-year-old Tang Tee Khoon.

Having won the grand prize for all-round best musician at the 1993 National Music Competition at age nine, Tang has gone on to become a chamber musician of the highest order. Her latest concert, one centred on Russian music, also showed she has matured beyond raw prodigious talent to something truly transcendent.

Despite her petite built, she exuded a big and brawny tone on the violin, one capable of cutting through plangent piano textures and capaciously filling the hall. In Prokofiev's Second Violin Sonata, she alternated between its bittersweet reminiscences and mercurial dervishes so expertly and confidently without as much as breaking into a sweat.

She brought out the requisite shades and nuances of Tchaikovsky's *Souvenir D'un Lieu Cher (Memory Of A Beloved Place)* ... Through these, an unfailingly singing tone happily co-existed with an iron-clad technique and razor-keen responses.

British pianist Sam Haywood was more than a mere accompanist. He was a partner in music-making whose crisp and clearly defined fingering enhanced the aesthetic experience of chamber music.

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The concert closed with the duo indulging in the fantasy world of Stravinsky's *Divertimento*, adapted from his ballet *The Fairy's Kiss* ... Elements of the Russian's neoclassical style mixed with romantic lushness and modernistic gestures defined its four connected sections, which flowed very pleasingly.

This was in large part due to the duo's gift of musical storytelling, highlighting the music's emotional peaks and troughs, while filling in the details with strong characterisations.

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(the audience) sincere enthusiasm was rewarded with another Russian gem, more heart-on-sleeve emoting in Rachmaninov's ethereal *Vocalise*.