



Orchestra aims for wider reach

A resident composer and an online store are part of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra's line-up

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The Singapore Chinese Orchestra has appointed a resident composer for the first time.

For the next two years, veteran musician Law Wai Lun will write new music for the ensemble, mentor budding composers and act as musical adviser to SCO music director Yeh Tsung. His appointment was announced yesterday at the Singapore Conference Hall.

"The orchestra just loves his music and the audience too," says maestro Yeh, 61, praising the "excellent quality" of the composer's music.

A graduate of Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music and a noted composer of film scores for Chinese movies in the 1980s, Law has over the last decade become better known for music with a distinct South-east Asian flavour – the so-called "Nanyang-style".

The first such piece he wrote for the SCO in 2003, Prince Sang Nila Utama And Singa, a 15-minute work inspired by the history of Singapore, has been updated and expanded to launch the orchestra's new season.

Now 30 minutes long, it will be the highlight of The Glorious Lion City concert on Aug 17 and 18 at the Singapore Conference Hall. Dancers from the Indonesian Padecwara Dance Group will interpret the piece as the orchestra plays.

Law, 68, says the composition expanded as he researched music in cities from Indonesia to China, hoping to perfect a style of music that would evoke the history of the Chinese diaspora in South-east Asia.



Besides performances by orchestra members such as the percussion and wind solo group (above) and guzheng player Xu Hui (above left), the Singapore Chinese Orchestra has also appointed veteran musician Law Wai Lun (left) as its resident composer. PHOTOS: LIM YAOHUI FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

"It's a work in progress, after all, this is still a short history," he says in Mandarin, as maestro Yeh translated.

As the concert is also a celebration of Singapore's National Day, Law has also adapted National Day theme songs in English such as Home and One United People into a medley that will be sung by veteran crooner Robert Fernando.

This blend of languages and musical styles is a point of pride for Yeh, who believes that playing traditional Chinese

music is only one of the functions of his orchestra. "It's important to show that we play for everyone," he says. "The orchestra's main mission must be to create new music and develop, because Chinese orchestras are themselves not traditional, but a product of looking forward."

Large ensembles with musicians playing Chinese instruments were set up only in the 1950s, to emulate Western symphony orchestras, he explains.

To that end, the SCO's new season

again bends genres with guest stars from East and West and a programme from Peking opera to the best of musical composer George Gershwin.

Visiting greats include noted erhu player George Gao from China, who will present Chinese pop and classical compositions on Nov 2 and 3; American pianist Leon Bates and soprano Kimberley Eileen Jones performing the best of Gershwin next July and performances of Peking opera in June, with China's Tianjin Municipal Youth Peking Opera Troupe.

To attract audiences, the SCO has revised its Friends Of The SCO programme to offer free membership and more discounts, while also launching an online music store via its website, www.sco.com.sg. The store has free and paid audio downloads, while an app for Apple and Android devices, also featuring free music and live updates, goes live on Aug 8.

"We hope to engage more audiences," says SCO general manager Terence Ho, 42. "This is a people's orchestra and we would like more people to come listen to the SCO."

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