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Stirring Chinese music with colourful tales

Review **Concert**

PICTURESQUE MOUNTAINS

Singapore Chinese Orchestra
Singapore Conference Hall/
Last Friday

Chang Tou Liang

The worlds of Chinese painting and Chinese music run close and parallel lives.

While absolute music exists in Chinese compositional repertoire, programme music inspired by legends, literature, historical events and scenery are de rigueur in works performed on Chinese instruments.

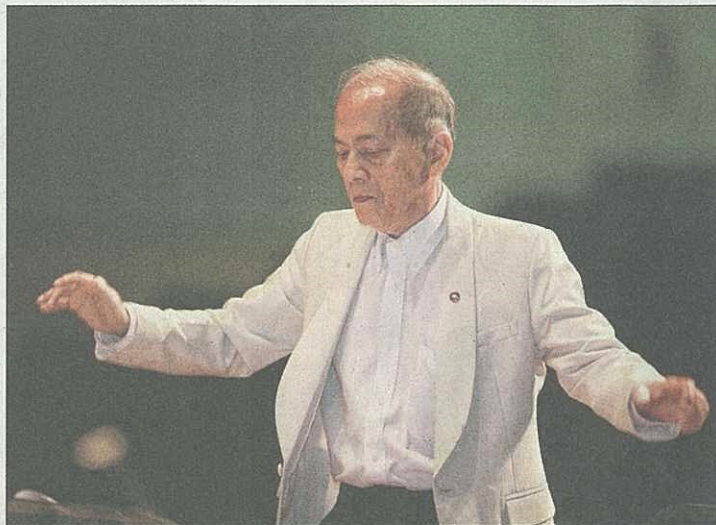
Traditional Chinese brush paintings are typically lyrical in their portrayal of reality, and the associated music is similarly effusive and expressive.

This premise was the main thrust of the well-conceived Singapore Chinese Orchestra concert directed by veteran conductor and Cultural Medallion recipient Tay Teow Kiat. There were four Singapore premieres, beginning with three movements from *Dwelling In The Fuchun Mountains*. Based on a famous Yuan (Mongol) dynasty painting, this is a composite work by no less than four composers.

Impressionistic might be a way to describe *Flowing Waters, Drifting Clouds and Sounds Of The Wind On An Intoxicating Night*, which opened with soft murmurs from the winds, with a preponderance of dulcet tones from the dizi family. The mellow alto voice of the qudi provided a balm of serenity and repose in the latter movement, accompanied by harp, bird-calls, rain stick and wordless vocalisations from women of the orchestra.

In *The Mountains And Rivers As One*, the suona heralded a call to arms in a crescendo which climaxed with solo voices, heroically helmed by tenor Zhuang Jie and soprano Su Yi Wen.

Taiwan-based Lo Leung Fai's *Beautiful Mount Chai* was an erhu concerto in all but name, one which displayed the solo prowess of Wang Gui Ying. Its programme in the form of a symphonic poem allowed Wang to run the full gamut of elegiac and



Cultural Medallion recipient Tay Teow Kiat (left) directed the Singapore Chinese Orchestra's Picturesque Mountains concert.
PHOTO: SINGAPORE CHINESE ORCHESTRA

exultant feelings, culminating with a series of discursive yet gripping solo cadenzas.

The orchestra accompanied discreetly and sensitively, never overwhelming the lone voice, and continued in the same vein for Liu Xi Jin's *Lingering Snow On The Broken Bridge*.

This is the famous wintry landscape of West Lake in Hangzhou, ubiquitous in literature and lore, which got the work it deserved. The single movement concerto for dizi followed the basic ternary form, with a most glorious of melodies bookending a scherzo-like dance for the piccolo-like bangdi, with soloist Zhan Yong Ming milking the sentimentality for all its worth.

The final work, *Three Friends Of Winter* by Gu Guan Ren, was an essay on three vegetative species which thrive in winter, serving as a metaphor for virtues of the Chinese people in lean and straitened times. *Stout Pine* portrayed strength and resistance with its heroic, martial gestures, contrasted with *Jade Bamboo*, a lilting serenade which bends with the wind but maintains its resilience.

Cheerful pipas and Zhao Jianhua's silky erhu completed the trilogy in *Winter Plum*, a sturdy flower which blooms and looks forward to the welcome onset of spring.

Close your eyes, and the stirring music begins to tell its own stories. That, in an essence, is the joy of Chinese music.