

Nostalgic musical trip for mums

Review **Concert**

A LOVE TRIBUTE TO MUM

Singapore Chinese Orchestra
Singapore Conference Hall/Last Saturday

Chang Tou Liang

The Singapore Chinese Orchestra (SCO) has laid claim to Mother's Day, the second Sunday of May, as a legitimate occasion to celebrate with a concert.

Like the Singapore Symphony Orchestra's popular Christmas and Valentine's Day concerts, this is well-subscribed and allows the players to collectively let down their hair in selections of popular classics and pop standards. Conducted by the effervescent SCO resident conductor Quek Ling Kiong, who doubled as emcee in Mandarin and a smattering of English and Hokkien, this latest Mother's Day Concert was a sentimental hit for its mostly middle-aged audience.

The first half was devoted to instrumental music, beginning with a medley of "motherly" songs entitled Dedicated To Her and arranged by Tan Kah Yong. Despite the lyrics in large type-face being projected on a screen and enthusiastic coaxing from the conductor, the audiences remained resistantly taciturn, waving their arms to the music instead. Better received were the two concertante works for dizi and huqin.

SCO dizi player Tan Chye Tiong mastered four instruments from the Chinese flute family in Liu Yuan's Capriccio Of Liu San Jie, a rhapsody on popular tunes from the 1960s cult movie on Third Sister Liu of ethnic Zhuang folklore.

His virtuosity in lyrical and lively dance passages was matched by that of Xu Wen Jing, who performed on two gaohus in a truncated version of the evergreen Butterfly Lovers Concerto. The portamenti achieved on the huqin came closer to the spirit of Chinese opera than the Western violin for which the work was originally written.

Both soloists were in excellent form, backed to the hilt by the sensitive orchestral accompaniment, but had to cede centre stage to local xinyao singer Hong Shao Xuan, who dominated the entire second half of the concert, which comprised mostly vocal music. He bantered with Quek and the audiences and went on to croon love songs such as a Chinese Perry Como.

The medley of Chameleon and The Brothers and Joseph Koo's Lou Tai Hui (Meeting At The Pavilion) was sung in Cantonese and, to further display his versatility in dialects and foreign languages, he rendered Mum Please Take Care in Japanese and Luo Da You's Xin Gan Bao Bei (Sweet Heart) in Hokkien.

Famous singer-songwriter Liu Jia Chang, whose songs have been immortalised by singers Teresa Teng and Fong Fei-fei, had six of his songs arranged by Law Wai Lun and Lincoln Lo in The Past Can Only Be Remembered, a colourful suite conceived like a young person's primer to Chinese orchestration.

The narration was a voiceover provided by Quek and a high point was reached in the third song, Where Is My Home, with Han Lei's plaintive guan serenely accompanied by lush strings.

By this time, the Mother's Day theme had morphed into a more general and universal form of love. Hong then dedicated his performances of Ye Lai Xiang (Evening Primrose) and Chao Yuen Zi Ye (Grassland Fantasy) to the women and men in the audience respectively and finished off with Cultural Medallion recipient Liang Wern Fook's xinyao hit, When I Think Of You.

Its rousing chorus was accompanied by an audience clap-along and a cheerful encore brought the 2½-hour evening's fare to a happy close.