

Source: **THE STRAITS TIMES** MONDAY, JUNE 8, 2015

Celebrating the return of Singapore talent

Review **Concert**

HOMECOMING

Singapore Chinese Orchestra
Singapore Conference Hall
Last Friday

Chang Tou Liang

This Singapore Chinese Orchestra concert, the first of a projected Homecoming series, was a showcase of Singaporean musical virtuosos who are now plying their trade overseas.

Three soloists, each a master, were welcomed home with a major concertante work that paraded their specific set of skills.

Conducted by music director Yeh Tsung, the concert began with SCO composer-in-residence Phoon Yew Tien's *Reminiscence Of March*, composed for the 1999 Singapore Arts Festival.

Unpitched percussion heralded a Wagnerian prelude from the strings, which led to a series of jaunty melodies involv-

ing all sections of the orchestra.

This cheerfully portrayed the onset of spring in all its infectious gaiety.

The rest of the concert was devoted to concertos, opening with Taiwan-based wind soloist Kwok Chin-chye playing the octavin in the Iranian piece, *My Friends*, arranged by Zhang Han Shu.

This rarely heard German instrument produces a dusky and earthy timbre in a Middle-Eastern-flavoured melody that resembled a muezzin's call to prayer. The nimble dance that ensued saw a further extension of its range, now sounding like a jazzy alto saxophone.

Kwok's second piece, which followed after the intermission, involved five instruments. Li Che Yi's *Rhapsody Of Da Gou*, based on the old name of Kaohsiung city, strung together a medley of ethnic tunes from the various peoples of Taiwan.

Here he comfortably transitioned between the nasal bleat of the suona, the goose-like honk of the ya-mu di (literally "mother duck fife"), the saxophone and a



Taiwan-based wind soloist Kwok Chin-chye played bitones on two suonas simultaneously. PHOTO: CHANG TOU LIANG

diminutive mouth reed. He had the audience in his palm and in stitches for the final tour de force, playing bitones on two suonas simultaneously.

Less of a vaudevillian number was Zong Jiang and He Dong's violin concerto *Luhuitou* (*Legend Of The Holy Deer*) with violinist Kam Ning, now based in Lon-

don. The work is a symphonic poem not unlike the better-known *Butterfly Lovers Concerto*, but about a hunter stalking a deer which magically transforms into a maiden on the turn of her head.

Its recurring main theme highlighted Kam's voluminous tone while the animated development section was more about impressive prestidigitation in a series of tricky arpeggio passages.

The third soloist was another wind specialist Choo Boon Chong, armed with an array of instruments from the dizi family, including the bangdi, qudi, baidi, shakuhachi, chi (a gourd-like instrument), xun (ocarina) and paixiao (panpipes).

Divine Melody by Qu Xiao Song was the most modern and subtle work on show and accompanied a video by Casey Lim of Tan Swie Hian's brush-strokes in painting *The Celestial Web*.

Its three movements were performed without break and the impressionist hues from Choo's most sensitive and persuasive playing were evocative of the legends of creation as the Chagall-like painting came into glorious fruition.

As a rousing encore, all three soloists returned to play solos in an arrangement of the foot-stomping *Farandole* from Georges Bizet's *L'Arlesienne*.

As a show of virtuoso prowess, this triple bill of Singaporean soloists coming home for SG50 was hard to beat.