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# SCO pays tribute to Singapore

Symphonic poem and excerpts from Mr Lee Kuan Yew's famous speeches highlight of concert

**Leong Weng Kam**  
Senior Writer

The Singapore Chinese Orchestra (SCO) kicks off its new season tonight with a musical tribute to Singapore, comprising mainly local compositions, popular songs and quotable quotes from the late founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew in a newly commissioned piece.

Independent Note, a symphonic poem written by Singapore-based British composer Eric Watson, will be performed by the orchestra while actor Lim Kay Tong, who plays Mr Lee in the upcoming film 1965, narrates about 21 excerpts from the leader's famous speeches over the past 50 years.

It will be the highlight of the concert, titled Towards The Future – SCO Celebrates SG50, at the Esplanade Concert Hall.

One of Mr Lee's quotes comes from a poignant speech he made when he announced Singapore's separation from Malaysia in August 1965: "Every time we look back on this moment when we signed this agreement it will be a moment of anguish. For me, it is a moment of anguish because all my life... the whole of my adult life, I have believed in the merger and the unity of these two territories... it broke everything we stood for."

SCO's music director and conductor Yeh Tsung points out that the music and quotes selected by Watson is the "first of its kind" here in which "the life, character, important events and achievements of the late Mr Lee for Singapore can all be heard in just over 10 minutes".

Yeh was inspired by American composer Aaron Copland's Lincoln's Portrait, a 1942 composition for orchestra featuring the narration of speeches by 19th-century American president Abraham Lincoln which showed his great leadership.

"If there is already such a work for a famous American president, I thought there should be one for an outstanding Asian statesman too, and that person should be none other than Lee Kuan Yew," says Yeh,

65, who will conduct the piece at tomorrow's concert.

Watson, 69, says he started work on the music at the end of last year and spent many hours in the library reading books and materials about Mr Lee before completing the composition about six weeks ago.

"I was still in the midst of writing the music when the sad news of Mr Lee's passing came in March," he recalls.

Watson, winner of SCO's First Singapore International Competition for Chinese Orchestral Compositions in 2006 with his work, Tapestries, says his admiration for the Singapore leader grew tremendously after writing the piece of music.

"I admire him for creating an inclusive society and his integrity which never wavered after all these years, as seen in his speeches," he adds.

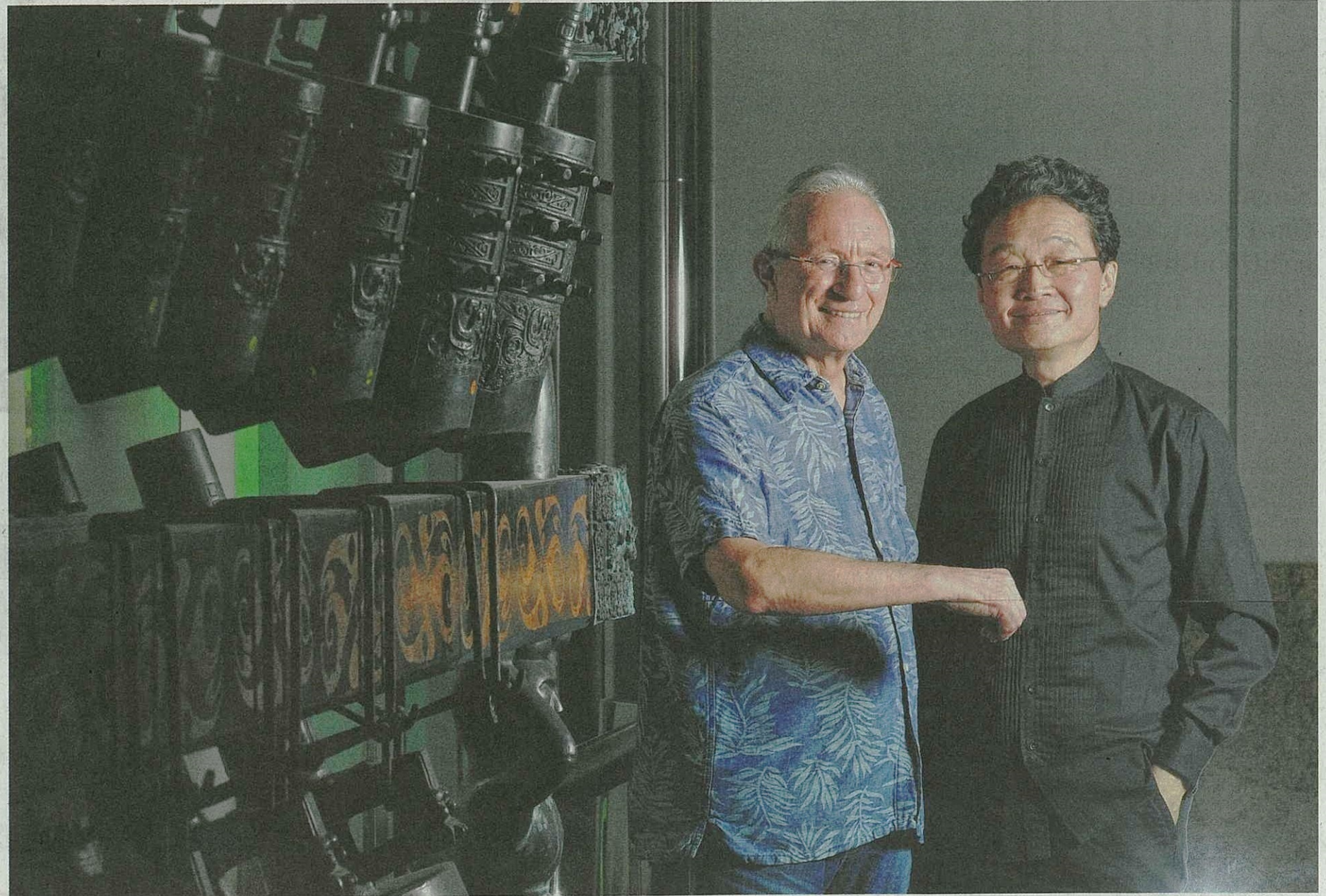
Also in the evening's programme are works of other leading composers, such as China-born Singaporean Law Wai Lun's recent symphonic poem Hong San See, about the trials and tribulations of Singapore's early Chinese immigrants, and Ode To Singapore, a symphonic work for chorus and orchestra composed for the concert to reflect the multicultural vibrancy in Singapore today and accompanied by the Vocal Consort Choir.

On a lighter note, the audience will hear re-arrangements of a medley of

music from evergreen Mandarin songs popular in Singapore from the 1940s to the 1960s by Phoon Yew Tien, a presentation of several xinyao numbers by six-member vocal group MICapella, as well as a medley of National Day theme songs, including We Are Singapore, One United People and Home, sung by home-grown vocalist Robert Fernando.

Award-winning Singaporean pianist Serene Koh will also play the 2003 work, Singapore Capriccio, by Chinese composer Kuan Nai-chung.

wengkam@sph.com.sg



## BOOK IT/TOWARDS THE FUTURE – SCO CELEBRATES SG50

WHERE: Esplanade Concert Hall

WHEN: Tonight, 7.30pm

ADMISSION: \$14\*, \$19\*, \$38, \$48, \$68, \$78 (excludes Sistic fee)

from Sistic

\*Concession prices.

SCO's music director and conductor Yeh Tsung (right) with British composer Eric Watson (left).

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