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# Orchestra to perform in HK and KL

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The Singapore Chinese Orchestra (SCO) will perform in Hong Kong later this month and in Kuala Lumpur in December for the first time to showcase works by Singaporean and Malaysian musicians as well as its repertoire of Nanyang music.

Led by music director Yeh Tsung, the 85-member orchestra will hold two concerts in Hong Kong – at Tsuen Wan Town Hall Auditorium on Oct 17 and Hong Kong Cultural Centre on Oct 18 – at the invitation of the city government's Leisure and Cultural Services Department.

Then at the Dewan Filharmonik Petronas in Kuala Lumpur on Dec 8, the orchestra will perform as part of the Titian Budaya Singapore cultural festival organised by the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth in the Malaysian capital to mark 50 years of Singapore-Malaysia bilateral ties.

Last Friday and Saturday evening, local audiences were able to savour the orchestra's Hong Kong performances first at the two preview concerts SCO staged at the Singapore Conference Hall.

Friday's concert, titled *Essence of Nanyang*, featured local composer Eric Watson's concert overture *Mahjong Kakis*, Malaysian Simon Kong's *Ispirazione II – Rambutan*, as well as SCO concert master Li Baoshun's performance of Chinese composer Tan Dun's *huqin* concerto, *Fire Ritual*.

Also performed was Chinese composer Liu Yuan's 2002 symphonic poem, *Marco Polo and Princess Blue*, which included the appear-



SCO concert master Li Baoshun playing the huqin at the Singapore Chinese Orchestra concert on Friday night. It was the first of two preview concerts being staged by SCO here. A preview of its Kuala Lumpur concert will be held at the Singapore Conference Hall on Nov 28. PHOTO: SINGAPORE CHINESE ORCHESTRA

ances of renowned Hong Kong tenor Warren Mok and Chinese soprano Wu Bixia, supported by the Singapore Youth Chorus.

At the Hong Kong Cultural Centre on Oct 18, both Mr Mok and Ms Wu will also sing the same piece, but with the Opera Hong Kong Chorus and Opera Hong Kong Children's Chorus instead.

On Saturday night, SCO performed its silent film concert, Ruan Lingyu's *The Goddess*, with music accompaniment composed by Singapore composer Law Wai Lun and Hong Kong composer Lincoln Lo. It will be played again at Tseun Wan auditorium in Hong Kong on Oct 17.

Composer Watson said: "I hope the Hong Kong audience will like my jazzy piece about mahjong, which is a popular game there too."

SCO executive director Terence

Ho said: "We are happy to be able to play in Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur finally. The Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra had performed in Singapore several times and it is good we showcase our unique Nanyang music repertoire, Chinese music with strong local flavour, there in return."

SCO will stage a preview of its Kuala Lumpur concert, titled *Cross Cultural Extravaganza*, at the Singapore Conference Hall on Nov 28 at 8 pm, featuring works by both Singaporean and Malaysian composers as well as performances by local artistes including Singapore Idol Taufik Batisah, jazz pianist Jeremy Monteiro, wayang kulit group Kumpulan Sri Campuran and tabla player Jatinder Singh Bedi.

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SHOWCASING NANYANG MUSIC

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MR TERENCE HO, executive director of the Singapore Chinese Orchestra

# Finding love in the little red dot

REVIEW / CONCERT

ESSENCE OF NANYANG  
Singapore Chinese Orchestra  
Singapore Conference Hall  
Last Friday

Chang Tou Liang

The Singapore Chinese Orchestra travels to Hong Kong in the middle of this month to perform two concerts. The first of its two pre-tour concerts displayed the orchestra's versatility that local audiences have come to know and expect.

Although titled *Essence Of Nanyang*, the concert conducted by Yeh Tsung offered more than just music inspired by South-east Asian sources.

The first two works had a popular and rhythmic twist, beginning with Zhao Dong Sheng's arrangement of the 1920s Cantonese tune *Han Tian Lei* (*Thunderstorm And Drought*), which featured electric guitar, drum-set and Han Lei's guanzi in what may be described as "Tempo

di Hard Rock".

Updated to 1960s and 1970s sensibilities, it served as an overture to the divertissement by Eric Watson called *Mahjong Kakis*, which continued in a similar jazzy thread. Its buzzing, bustling percussive beat was infectious, like the enthusiasm displayed when four old friends get together to pit their wits on small stakes.

Altogether more serious was Tan Dun's *Fire Ritual*, where affairs of the ancient imperial courts are carried out like an elaborate piece of musical theatre.

SCO concertmaster Li Bao Shun was an impressive soloist on gaohu, erhu and zhonghu, supported by the orchestra and random soloists scattered throughout the hall. Percussion and ceremonial suonas led the way, punctuated by vocalisations from conductor Yeh, who took on a shaman-like role, as well as orchestral members.

Common to several Tan scores, the sound of paper flapping in the air, whistles and bird calls were part of the musical fabric. The procession began dramatically but took on a more serene and sedate turn before the main themes were elucidated. Almost like a religious ceremony, the work closed with an impactful ritual silence.

The element of Nanyang came with a vengeance in the second half. First came an *amuse bouche* in the form of Sabah native Simon Kong's *Rambutan*, a rhythmically driven movement from *Ispirazione II*, a suite based on East Malaysian fruits. Like the diminutive fruit itself, a single gulp and it was over.

The major work of the concert

was three movements from Liu Yuan's *Marco Polo And Princess Blue*, a work commissioned for the Esplanade Opening Festival in 2002.

Although titled a symphonic poem, it is more a cantata scored for two solo voices, mixed chorus and orchestra. It was based on Italian explorer Marco Polo's final mission for Kublai Khan, which was to escort his daughter from Cathay via the sea-route to an arranged marriage with the Prince of Persia.

As one might have guessed, the two develop feelings for each other as the voyage passes a "little red dot" along the way.

*Tristan And Isolde* it is not. Even the presence of two top Chinese opera stars, tenor Warren Mok and soprano Wu Bi Xia who sang with amplification, could not disguise its banalities. *Eden In The East*, a duet taking on the style of a Neapolitan serenade (*Marco Polo was Venetian*) accompanied by la-la-la's from the SYC Ensemble Singers, was merely one of many cringeworthy moments.

The eventual parting of ways in *Eternal Love* was no *Liebestod* (love-death), but the poignant memory of a song which unites their spirits forever and its tune is none other than... Singapore, O Singapore (that sunny island set in the sea). Energised with familiarity, the singers and orchestra then rightly whipped up an apotheosis worthy of a Shostakovich finale, which brought on the applause and no little cheers.

To be fair, Yeh and his charges gave this music an outing that is unlikely to be bettered any time soon. It is hoped that Hong Kongers respond favourably to its share of exoticisms and novelty value.