

CULTURE



The Singapore Chinese Orchestra performs to accompany a showing of the 1934 silent film *The Goddess*. A Hong Kong performance is set for tomorrow. Photo: SCMP Pictures

Lion City ensemble adds strings to the silence

Singapore Chinese Orchestra to make HK debut with touch of local style

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One of Singapore's flagship orchestras will showcase its unique sound with a tinge of local style in its Hong Kong debut, its music director has said.

The Singapore Chinese Orchestra, one of the Lion City's two national ensembles, will perform at the weekend under its maestro Tsung Yeh, who called Hong Kong his second home.

"It's a homecoming concert for me," said Yeh, who was music director of the Hong Kong Sinfonietta from 1999 to 2002.

Yeh has led orchestras in the



The orchestra's music director **Tsung Yeh**. Photo: Jonathan Wong

United States and Hong Kong since launching his career in the 1980s. But the solid support he found in Singapore has led him to look no further since 2002.

"Aside from having our own

hall and office in a historic building, the prime minister comes to our concerts as a patron twice a year and even donated S\$750,000 [HK\$4.18 million] out of his own pocket to support a composition competition. I think that's quite a record," he said.

Such backing has allowed the orchestra to commission new works to build and enrich a unique style for the city state.

According to Robin Hu, the orchestra's chairman from 2008 to 2012 and now CEO of the *South China Morning Post*, "the unique sound of the orchestra came as a result of the collision and coalescence of different cultures in Southeast Asia".

"Having also mastered the repertoire of classical Chinese orchestral works, it has successfully developed its own defined style, refined poise and endearing sound," he added.

To highlight its "Nanyang" style, Yeh helped organise international competitions to solicit new works for the orchestra in 2006 and 2011, and some of the winning entries, such as Malay composer Simon Kong's *Rambutan*, will be featured at the second Hong Kong concert on Sunday.

"We have in mind the Hong Kong audience on this historic visit, so we'll open the concert with the popular Cantonese work *Thunder in a Drought* in a new jazzy style reflecting Singapore's coming of age," Yeh said.

Also on show will be Singa-

pore-based British composer Eric Watson's *Mahjong Kakis*.

The two major works that will bring in local forces are Tan Dun's *Fire Ritual* and Liu Yuan's *Marco Polo and Princess Blue*, which will include 15 *suonas* – or Chinese oboes – played by young Hongkongers, and tenor Warren Mok with his chorus alongside soprano Wu Bixia.

Tomorrow will see the orchestra play to accompany a showing of silent movie *The Goddess*, the 1934 film starring Ruan Lingyu.

"This is the first overseas performance since the premiere last year, which drew as much applause as tears from the audience," said Yeh, referring to the orchestra's first performance to the film. "It's like buy one, get one free – a great treat."

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