

# All things Chinese to welcome spring

Review Concert

## RHAPSODIES OF SPRING 2015

Singapore Chinese Orchestra  
Singapore Conference Hall/Last Saturday

### Chang Tou Liang

The Singapore Chinese Orchestra's annual Chinese New Year concerts, titled Rhapsodies Of Spring, have become as much an institution as the Singapore Symphony Orchestra's Christmas Concerts. Besides being celebratory in nature and content, they also have an ethnocentric element to remind the audience what it means to be Chinese. This aspect was more palpably felt in this year's edition.

Cast in the central role was popular radio and television personality Marcus Chin (Chen Jianbin) serving as host with his constant bantering with conductor Yeh Tsung, who gamely played along. After the rousing Spring Festival Overture by Li Huan Zhi, Chin stole the show in a varied selection of songs that amply displayed his skills in orating, rhyming and crooning.

Recalling the itinerant street entertainers of China, New Street Vendor and The Shoe Cleaner had the rustic quality of folk songs which Chin delivered with natural flair and humour. This was contrasted with the Russian song Under The Silvery Moon and Sichuan folk song Radiant With Joy, the latter sung in original dialect with its quite exotic inflexions. Taiwanese composer Liu Jia-chang's The Clown provided moments of sober reflection, the sort encountered in Leoncavallo's verismo classic I Pagliacci.

Sheng player Zhong Zhiyue, attired in Miao costume, performed Xu Chao Ming and Lu Zai Yi's Blowing The Lusheng, Singing The Harvest on the lusheng, the ethnic Hmong variant of the mouth organ. This was a rhapsodic work with a slow introduction and cadenza before breaking out in a fast tribal dance with nifty footwork to match. Improvisation on a modern sheng defined Zhong's stylish take on Bob Gaudio's infectious Can't Take My Eyes Off You, the Frankie Valli hit song heard in Jersey Boys.

No Chinese New Year concert would be complete without some skit or other. Filial Piety, scripted and directed by Chin with music arranged by Tan Kah Yong, revolved around a dysfunctional fam-



The short film Family Reunion by Anthony Chen was screened with music by Law Wai Lun. PHOTO: CHANG TOU LIANG

ily where the old granny is ill-treated by the mistress of the house until the latter gets a comeuppance of her own. With appearances by Lin Ruping, Xu Qiongfang, Chew Wen, Zhang Xiong and Chin in a cross-dressing role, it was quite funny but somewhat preachy in tone.

Far more subtle was award-winning film director Anthony Chen's 2011 short film Family Reunion with music by Law Wai Lun. The idea of family and bonding through the generations came across strongly in its brief 11 minutes, which captured fast-disappearing scenes from Singapore through the decades in the eyes of a dialect-speaking heartland family.

Sim Boon Yew's Spring Suite III was a lively medley of seasonal songs, including In Spring and Winds Across The Land, with the irrepressible Chin leading the audience in a sing-along and clap-along. More familiar were He Xin Nian (New Year Greetings) and Da Di Hui Chun (Spring Returns) which ushered in two gods of wealth, who dished out chocolates in the shape of gold coins and ingots.

Par for the course for a festive concert where family values and all things Chinese become as important as or even supercede the music itself. Attended by an over-subscribed house over two evenings, a surfeit of goodwill and good wishes cannot be a bad thing.