

Source: THE STRAITS TIMES | MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2015

From joy to horror to awakening

REVIEW/CONCERT

STRUMMING HEARTSTRINGS

Singapore Chinese Orchestra
Singapore Conference Hall/
Last Saturday

Chang Tou Liang

On an evening that saw Matthias Goerne singing Schubert's *Winterreise* and Stephen Hough playing Beethoven piano concertos, the Singapore Chinese Orchestra (SCO) had a full house in a blockbuster concert of its own. It shared the stage with three soloists, including pre-eminent Scottish percussionist Dame Evelyn Glennie.

The concert conducted by SCO Music Director Yeh Tsung began with three works by Chinese composer Liu Chang Yuan.

In the opening *Carnival Dance* (2013), Liu celebrated the universality of folk music through diverse sources of inspiration. The *dizi* and *sheng* melodies, in their pentatonic glory, shared something common with dances from the British Isles. The *huqins* then conjured a

tune of Central Asian influence, while the slower central section flirted with the tango. The orchestra performed with its usual infectious enthusiasm.

Receiving its World Premiere was *Bright Moon Over The Ocean* (2015), a concerto for *guan*zi commissioned by the SCO. An essay in nostalgia, the rhapsodic work portrayed the emotions of Chinese emigrants leaving their homeland for new pastures in Nanyang. Soloist Han Lei performed brilliantly with three instruments, traversing lament-like themes to animated dances of a more exotic kind. Somewhere he took a diversion into jazz rhythms, as if stumbling into Harlem, before returning to the more chromatic hustle-bustle of Shenton Way.

Arguably the best work of three was *Dream Interpretation* (2011), an *erhu* concerto with excellent soloist Yu Hong Mei.

In 10 linked sections, the *erhu* emoted with a panoply of moods and expressive devices. The dream began mysteriously, working its way through joy, happiness and longing to the dissonance of fear

and horror, before closing with a sublime awakening. More Straussian than Freudian, the creative metamorphosis of themes makes this work one that will bear multiple hearings.

The concert's second half was devoted to Canadian-Chinese composer Vincent Ho's *The Shaman* (2011), the percussion concerto that starred Glennie.

Sporting waist-long silver locks, she looked the part of its eponymous title as she gracefully glided through her battery of percussion. Its three connected movements were a veritable playground for the barefoot virtuosa, with unpitched percussion (drums, cymbals, bowls and slung metallic strips) beating out complex rhythms, while vying for attention with the more intimate pitched instruments.

It was the quiet and contemplative 2nd movement *Fantasia-Nostalgia* which saw the marimba and vibraphone come to the fore with much melodic interest.

Rapport with the orchestra was closely knit and she formed a tight yet sensitive alliance with orchestral timpanist Duan Fei and pianist Clarence Lee. Exuding sheer exuberance, she easily won over an audience supposedly shy of contemporary music. Their vociferous support earned a well-deserved encore, Ho's *Nostalgia*, adapted from the concerto's slow movement. *Bravissima!*