

# Impressive acrobatics performed on the cello

**Review** **Concert**

## COMING HOME

Braddell Heights Symphony Orchestra  
School of the Arts Concert Hall/Last Sunday

## Chang Tou Liang

Curious fact: The Singaporean who has had the most concertos performed this millennium is Bernard Tan, a National University of Singapore physics professor who composes in his free time.

Following the first performances of his Piano Concerto (2002), Violin Concerto (2006) and Guitar Concerto (2013) by the Singapore Symphony Orchestra, his Cello Concerto received its world premiere on Sunday.

It was performed by Noella Yan, a Singaporean cellist living in Australia, with the Braddell Heights Symphony Orchestra conducted by Adrian Tan.

Yan is the daughter of the orchestra's founding conductor Yan Yin Wing. This concerto marked her return here and to performing after she took time

out to look after her two young sons. Any concessions to technical ability were dispensed with in this demanding work that called for utmost concentration and agility.

In a way, Tan resembles the Armenian composer Aram Khachaturian in that he uses a few simple themes of local and ethnological flavour and works these exhaustively in a show of soloistic exuberance. The opening movement balanced a repetitive scherzo-like first motif with a lyrical second subject of Asian origin; the central slow movement was a seamless Chinese melody of Tan's own device. Yan's cantabile playing, full-voiced yet never cloying, came to the fore.

The finale took off in a head of steam, in a perpetual movement that obliged the soloist to jump through a seemingly unending series of hoops. The orchestra's flautist, oboist and clarinetist reciprocated in florid flourishes. Following an acrobatic cadenza by Yan, the concerto closed on a dizzying aplomb.

The concert began with the first movement of Schubert's Unfinished Symphony. While that might

sound incomplete, it had the effect of an overture. The orchestra warmed up quickly and there was some very satisfying playing from the strings, especially the cello section in the movement's most familiar melody.

Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony closed the concert. Conductor Tan spoke informally about the moods that coloured the work and the transformation from darkness to light as the music progressed. While there were moments in its four movements which taxed the musicians, these were more than made up for by the passion exhibited in the playing.

While clarinetist Ian Lam and French horn player Darren Sim impressed with solos, it was the general ensemble that rose to each climactic high with brass in imperious form. It was not difficult to follow the thread: pensiveness in the slow movement, a more relaxed waltz rhythm for the third movement, before the all-out triumph to end the symphony.

This orchestra has made tremendous strides since the homecoming of music director Tan from his studies. Long may this continue.