

CONCERT OF THE MONTH By Dr Chang Tou Liang

MELVYN TAN Piano Recital
19 January 2010, 7.30 pm
Esplanade Concert Hall
Tickets available at SISTIC

Singapore-born pianist Melvyn Tan returns home to give a piano recital, his first here in almost 40 years. Considered Singapore's greatest pianist, he made his name performing on the fortépiano, an early keyboard instrument that preceded the piano's popularity. His recordings of music by Beethoven, Mozart and Schubert, recorded on the EMI Classics and Virgin Classics labels, have received rave reviews around the world. His Singapore recital on the modern grand piano includes works by Schumann, Chopin and Debussy.

DR CHANG TOU LIANG (CTL): Do you remember the last time you gave a piano recital in Singapore?

MELVYN TAN (MT): It was really so long ago. So much water has passed under the bridge. As a teenager I must have felt some anticipation but now 40 years later it is very difficult to recall.

CTL: What attracted you to the fortépiano and with whom did you study?

MT: When I decided to play the fortépiano professionally, very few players were on the scene. Everything I have learnt has been entirely self taught by reading different theses from the 18th and 19th centuries, and by learning through trial and error what works for me and what doesn't. Performing is a long, long laborious process and one's learning NEVER stops. And it's only natural as an individual to evolve and develop new ideas.

CTL: What prompted your return to performing on the modern piano?

MT: It happened over a long period of time. Many assume at the time that it happened kind of overnight. One of the reasons was that I was beginning to miss playing later repertoire and playing with good modern orchestras in bigger halls. The majority of my work now is on the modern piano, playing works by Chopin, Schumann, Liszt, Debussy, Messiaen and chamber music, though I enjoy the fortépiano when I occasionally come back to it.

CTL: You have also done some conducting. Tell us about that experience.

MT: Directing from the keyboard is a very liberating experience, much closer to a chamber music approach than a concerto situation. Players in the ensemble actually listen to you and that alone has a much more concentrated effect on the musical performance. I see it as much more like chamber music making rather than me dishing out orders to the players and following me regardless.

CTL: What are your feelings returning to perform in Singapore?

MT: I am obviously much looking forward to it. Besides performing, I'll also be conducting three masterclasses with music students. The arts in Singapore have been progressing very well. I've been away for a long time and it would be a great pleasure to share some of the musical journeys I have embarked on. Journeys which may have been life changing, but always a total pleasure.

CD OF THE MONTH

BEETHOVEN Piano Concertos
MELVYN TAN, Fortépiano
London Classical Players
Sir Roger Norrington
Virgin Classics
7243 5 62242 2 3 (4 CDs)



This is Beethoven as you are unlikely to have heard before. On the fortépiano, the concertos sound sleek and lean, shorn of the cholesterol one might be more accustomed to on the modern grand piano. With faster tempos and lighter textures adopted by the period instrument orchestra, Beethoven begins to sound more like Mozart or Haydn. In addition to the five concertos, Melvyn Tan includes the Choral Fantasia, a concertante-choral work that looks forward to the Ninth Symphony. A further disc of Bagatelles, all short pieces, is performed on Beethoven's own Broadwood piano. The box-set retails at budget price.

COMPOSER OF THE MONTH

FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN (1810-1849)

In short: Young Polish piano prodigy who left his homeland for good, settling in France to become the darling of the Parisian high society salon.

Fact: Every single work he composed included the piano. The world celebrated his bicentenary in 2010. Singapore organised its first ever International Chopin Piano Competition in December 2010.

Listen to: 2 Piano Concertos, 21 Nocturnes, Mazurkas and Polonaises (traditional Polish dances), 19 Waltzes and 27 Études.

Specialists: Arthur Rubinstein, Martha Argerich, Murray Perahia, Li Yundi

Died from: Galloping consumption (Tuberculosis)

