

CONCERT OF THE MONTH

By Dr Chang Tou Liang



Stravinsky Symphony of Psalms
Walton Belshazzar's Feast
Singapore Symphony Orchestra and Choruses
Conducted by Lim Yau
15 April 2011, 7.30 pm
Esplanade Concert Hall
Tickets available from SISTIC

The Singapore Symphony Chorus celebrates its 31st year in 2011. For an ensemble more accustomed to performing the great symphonic choral works of the 18th and 19th centuries, the challenge is taking on contemporary works. "How can you call yourself a 21st century chorus if you don't master 20th century music?" questioned its long-time Music Director Lim Yau. To this cause, he has championed 20th century choral works over the decades, leading memorable performances of music by Hindemith, Schoenberg, Poulenc, Janacek and MacMillan. This year's offerings are however the most ambitious.

The season of 1930-31 was an important one for choral music, as it was witness to the first performances of two most enduring choral works from the 20th century. Both were memorable in different ways, and here's how:



IGOR STRAVINSKY
(1882-1971)
Symphony of Psalms

Composed for:
 50th anniversary of the
 Boston Symphony Orchestra

First conducted by:
 Serge Koussevitzky

Setting of: Psalms No.39, 40 and 150 (in Latin)

Notable for: Stravinsky's reaffirmation of his faith and roots in the Russian Orthodox Church; the symphony was composed to the glory of God

Highlights:

Exaudi orationem meam, Domine (Hear my prayer, O Lord)
 – short highly rhythmic introduction
Expectans expectavi Dominum (I waited patiently for the Lord)
 – elaborate fugal writing for woodwinds and chorus
Alleluia, laudate Dominum (Praise ye the Lord)
 – song of praise alternating the devotional with the orgiastic

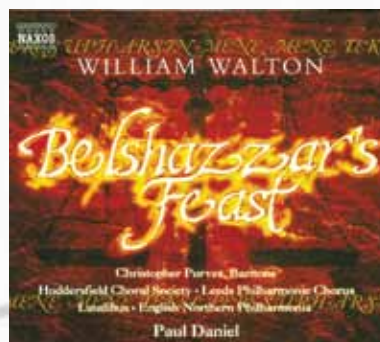
Recommended listening:

Chorus of Deutsche Oper, Berlin
 Berlin Philharmonic / Herbert von Karajan
 Deutsche Grammophon 423 252-2
 A vintage 1975 recording that combines precision playing with penitential fervour.

Other music: The ballets *The Firebird*, *Petrushka*, *The Rite of Spring*, *Pulcinella*, *Les Noces* (*The Wedding*)

Why you should attend *Symphony of Psalms*:

"An otherworldly experience... completely unlike anything we have sung before, such as Handel's *Messiah*... and never a dull moment." – Dr Janet Gouw (Alto, SSC), family physician in private practice



SIR WILLIAM WALTON
(1902-83)
Belshazzar's Feast

Composed for:
 Leeds Festival

First conducted by:
 Sir Malcolm Sargent

Setting of: Selections from the books of Daniel and Revelation (in English)

Notable for: Technicolour re-enactment of the glory and decadence of Belshazzar's mighty empire of Babylon, and its equally spectacular demise

Highlights:

Thus spake Isiah
 – atmospheric choral opening
Praise ye the lord of Gold
 – grand processional which gets increasingly rowdy
Then sing aloud to God
 – after Belshazzar is slain, the Israelite captives rejoice

Recommended listening:

Christopher Purves, Baritone
 Laudibus, Huddersfield Festival, Leeds Philharmonic Choruses
 English Northern Philharmonia / Paul Daniel
 Naxos 8.555869
 A budget recording that does not stint on details, excitement or grandeur.

Other music: Two symphonies, *Violin Concerto*, *Facade* (an entertainment), marches and overtures, film music for *Henry V*, *The Battle of Britain*

Why you should attend *Belshazzar's Feast*:

"A fascinating blend of classic and modern idioms... very challenging for the singer, but the listener will find the melodies almost familiar." – Mr Alan Smith (Tenor, SSC), Senior Manager, Mt Alvernia Hospital