


 Foo Say Ming (centre) leads re: mix on the violin

# Concert of the Month

By Dr Chang Tou Liang

## TURN! TURN! TURN! ...

### The Twelve Seasons

Foo Say Ming, Violin

1 May 2011

Esplanade Concert Hall, 7.30 pm

This very interesting concert by re: mix, Singapore's hippest chamber orchestra, presents *The Four Seasons* by Antonio Vivaldi, *Four Seasons of Buenos Aires* by Astor Piazzolla and four new *Seasons* by four different Singaporean composers. Dr Chang Tou Liang catches up with violinist Foo Say Ming, leader of re: mix, and learns more about his group's latest musical escapade.

**Dr Chang Tou Liang – CTL:** Your chamber ensemble re: mix has developed quite a reputation in exploring new vistas of classical and popular music, and literally remixing them together. How did a classical violinist such as yourself arrive at this state of affairs?

**Foo Say Ming – FSM:** re: mix has been asked this many times before, and our replies have always been surprising and often hilarious, such as: "We're an outrageous group with exuberance and wild ideas..." and "Being fun-loving musicians, it is only natural that we have super fun

in our concerts..."

There is just so much great music out there. The biggest limitation for any musician who loves good music is to play just one instrument. We asked ourselves: "Why does good music have to be confined to the instrumentation it was originally conceived? Would such music still be great if presented in any other form?"

In a nutshell, we want to explore music within the chamber orchestra genre, and exude the energy of a rock concert in the concert hall! We hope to continue to having fun, and have our audience join us in sharing this fun.

**CTL:** Do tell us what the pop song "Turn! Turn! Turn!" has to do with *The Four Seasons* of Antonio Vivaldi.

**FSM:** Back in the 60s, singer-songwriter Pete Seeger adapted verses from Chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes for the lyrics of the hit song "Turn! Turn! Turn!" The whole chapter is summed up by its first verse: "to everything, there is a season". While Vivaldi's almost programmatic *Four Seasons* may not find resonance with these verses, we can see some common ground. Vivaldi's *Seasons* graphically describes scenes of the Italian seasons about 300 years ago, such as dances of love, harvest, festivities, solitude, mourning and rejoicing. Through this

thought, we find a musical thread: that in life, there is a time for everything.

**CTL:** Now you've done the Gidon Kremer thing by combining Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* with Astor Piazzolla's *Four Seasons of Buenos Aires*, and you've added four more Singaporean *Seasons* to this mix. Will this sound like some kind of rojak?

**FSM:** If it does turn out to be one, we hope that it would be a good *rojak*; after all, it still is a signature Singaporean dish! Jokes aside, what re: mix hopes to achieve and convey in this very exciting programme is that life has its rhythm, and is, for some, a line that has no end. What better way to present this concept with a Singaporean angle, by featuring Singaporean composers expressing their thoughts through music. In the four new works, we hope to invite our audience to ponder about the ups and downs of life's journey. Hence, "to everything, there is a season".

**CTL:** Who are these Singaporean composers, and what can they offer our listeners?

**FSM:** At the helm of this project is veteran composer Kelly Tang, who is also advisor for this re: mix special commission. The works of four composers are combined into one uniquely Singaporean canvas. We are excited to feature three rising Singaporean composers: Chen Zhang Yi, Denise Lee, and Derek Lim. Excellent in their own right, they are as diverse in their styles as their strengths! We "assigned" various movements and ideas to each in hope that these may become a vessel for their best composing skills, character and temperament. Their scores are trickling in, and we are already impressed and excited about performing these works. Our listeners can expect to experience an incredible palette of emotions and creativity!

**CTL:** How has working on these twelve *Seasons* with re: mix enriched your life? Why should the audience come?

**FSM:** On a musical level, the pieces have a strong resonance with us performers. While the melodies in the Vivaldi *Seasons* have become evergreens, they still evoke very universal emotions such as joy, love, and fear nonetheless. Piazzolla's tangos are beloved because of the palpable beat and raunchy dance steps, but the music is laced with sorrow and frustration.

The Singapore *Seasons* boast the best of Singapore's young composers, and their style is nothing shy of intense and diverse. The concert will be a roller-coaster of emotions, intensities and colours, for both performers and listeners.

There is a season for everything. And on Labour Day, we invite all to lend an ear and a supporting hand for some of Singapore's talented composers. And also to spend a relaxing evening with re: mix playing some of the most beautiful music written for the string orchestra.

## CD OF THE MONTH

### BEETHOVEN CELLO SONATAS

Li-Wei Qin, Cello

Albert Tiu, Piano

Decca 889 9119 (2 CDs)



Beethoven's five cello sonatas (Op 5, 69 and 102) spanned the three different periods of his creative output, and are highly original works without precedent. Combining an

irrepressible spirit with much poetry, these make a pleasurable listen in a single take. Chinese-Australian cellist Li-Wei Qin and Filipino pianist Albert Tiu, both residing in Singapore, respond with vigour and brio, breathing life into these scores. Qin's tone is voluminous and breathtaking, while Tiu's exacting piano partnership comes through with great immediacy and clarity. This set (two for the price of one disc) deserves to happily sit alongside celebrated versions by Rostropovich, Maisky and Yo-Yo Ma.

## COMPOSER OF THE MONTH

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)

**In short:** World's greatest composer, a revolutionary and pioneer of the symphonic and Romantic movements. Best remembered because he became stone-deaf, and composed his greatest music thereafter.

**Fact:** Beethoven's tinnitus and subsequent deafness have been attributed to a number of conditions, including otoclerosis, syphilis, systemic lupus erythematosus, Paget's disease, typhus and lead poisoning.

**Listen to:** 9 symphonies, 7 piano concertos, 1 violin concerto, 32 piano sonatas, 10 violin sonatas, 5 cello sonatas, 15 string quartets and his sole opera *Fidelio*.

**Specialists:** Herbert von Karajan, Otto Klemperer, John Eliot Gardiner (symphonies), Artur Schnabel, Daniel Barenboim, Paul Lewis (piano music), Arthur Grumiaux, Anne-Sophie Mutter (violin music), Mstislav Rostropovich (cello music), Tokyo String Quartet (string quartets).

**Died from:** Pneumonia, also thought to have had syphilis, liver cirrhosis and iatrogenic lead poisoning. **SMA**