

Exquisite music

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THE POETRY IN LIFE - SCHUMANN, ADES, BRAHMS

Luca Buratto (piano), Jazimina Macneil (mezzo-soprano), Daniel Chong and Tang Tee Khoon (violins), Giovanni Gnocchi (cello), Florent Heau (clarinet)

Esplanade Recital Studio/Last Friday

This first evening concert of the 12th edition of the extravagantly titled Tang Tee Khoon Grand Series of concerts lived up to its promise, featuring top musicians playing what Tang describes as "timeless" music.

The programme featured four distinct instrumental combinations, with pianist Luca Buratto anchoring every work.

Clarinetist Florent Heau, a leading figure in the French school of clarinet playing, opened with Schumann's Three Fantasy Pieces For Clarinet And Piano. Often performed on viola or cello with piano, this mainstay of the Romantic repertoire for clarinet showed off Heau's exquisite clarinet tone.

He and Buratto played with an ease that comes with complete mastery of their instruments and, at times, it seemed as if Heau needed no breathing to support the typically extended Schumann-esque phrases. They produced a rich, clear and wonderfully nuanced sound, the best that this reviewer has heard in the cosy, slightly over-damped acoustics of the Esplanade Recital Studio.

They later returned on stage with contemporary British composer Thomas Ades' Six Court Studies from *The Tempest* with violinist Daniel Chong and cellist Giovanni Gnocchi. The angular music, with its bouts of darkness, dissonance and cacophony, was transcribed from episodes of the composer's opera and was entertaining and tautly performed.

Mezzo-soprano Jazimina Macneil also began her performance with Schumann, with *Frauen-Liebe Und Leben* (A Woman's Love And Life), based on the cycle of poems of the same name by Adelbert von Chamisso. Her rich, resonant mezzo range, natural phrasing and excellent dramatisation, coupled with superb piano playing from Buratto made this a performance to savour.

Macneil's other Schumann offering was *Gedichte Der Konigin Maria Stuart* (Mary Stuart Songs), another of the composer's popular song cycles, based on text by Mary Stuart chronicling her

departure from France and her pleas for salvation moments before her death. Singing with even greater emotion and pathos, Macneil delivered a heartfelt performance.

The Mary Stuart Songs were preceded by Ades' realisations of two Purcell songs based on the Tempest.

Here, Buratto adjusted his playing to perfectly adapt his modern instrument to produce sound that was more appropriate for Purcell's period. Macneil's attempt to add colour and drama to the text seem to have an opposite effect though.

The final work was once again by Schumann, his Piano Trio No. 2, this time with Tang on the violin. The more effervescent of his two piano trios, the work was delivered with great energy and spirit, and a beautifully sensitive slow movement.

But despite their best efforts, Tang's rounded violin tone and Gnocchi's vigorous cello-playing could not match the heft of Buratto on the modern grand piano.

Still, it was a delight to be able to enjoy Schumann's musical genius via this showcase of his chamber music, performed by this distinguished gathering of musicians.

Mervin Beng

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