

First collaboration between Yong Siew Toh and NUS orchestras a celebratory affair

CONCERT

YST ORCHESTRAL INSTITUTE X
NUS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Yong Siew Toh Conservatory
Concert Hall
March 24

Chang Tou Liang

When the newly inaugurated Yong Siew Toh Conservatory mounted its first orchestral concert in 2003, the ensemble conducted by Chan Tze Law was merely the second symphony orchestra on campus.

The incumbent was the National University of Singapore Symphony Orchestra (Nusso), formed in 1979 by the late Paul Abisheganaden.

Strangely, the two orchestras had never collaborated over the past

21 years, even on occasion holding rival concerts on the same day. This joint concert marked a breakthrough, a result of conservatory vice-dean Chan also holding the directorship of the NUS Centre for the Arts.

Uniting soon-to-be-professionals with recreational musicians, the concert programme relived the conservatory orchestra's maiden voyage with Chan again at its helm. Opening with Ho Chee Kong's Fanfare, the rousing music centred on C major with brass and string flourishes portending early promise which would come to fruition with the present.

Equally celebratory was Johannes Brahms' Academic Festival Overture, composed for the University of Breslau, where he received an

honorary degree in 1881.

Typical of the German's humour, the work quoted student songs, culminating with the rowdy drinking song *Gaudeamus Igitur*.

The young musicians were well-behaved in ensemble if not totally impeccable, but made a good fist of the music with cymbal clashes and ringing triangle at its close.

The obligatory concertante work was Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Sinfonia Concertante In E Flat Major (K.297b), which highlighted four wind soloists.

While the 2003 line-up was of faculty members (also Singapore Symphony principals), the four soloists this evening were their students Sho Yong Shuen (oboe), Chen Yan-Rung (clarinet), Shi Jiaao (bassoon) and Yeh Shih-Hsin



Conductor Chan Tze Law helmed this first collaboration between the YST Orchestral Institute and NUS Symphony Orchestra.
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to the Prague Academy in 1890 and receiving honours from Cambridge University. Although less famous than his Ninth Symphony (the "New World"), it scored high for its collegial spirit.

The full-strength ensemble of both orchestras gave a performance of passion and polish. The opening melody on cellos could not have sounded more mellow, its singing tone soon transmitting to the rest. Conductor Chan kept a tight ship, yet allowed the lyrical music to flow.

Slavonic qualities of the central movements came to the fore, the slow movement's rusticity contrasted with the third movement's lilting dance. Excellent brass ruled the cheerful finale, which also delighted in a celebration of counterpoint.

The very warm audience reception was rewarded with a contemplative encore, the slow movement from Ho's *Of Passion And Passages*, reflecting hope for a bright future ahead.

(French horn).

This foursome worked very well together, first as a unit as they entered, then separately as solo parts took a life of their own.

Backed to the hilt by pared-down orchestral forces, here was true chamber music at work. Lyricism ruled in the slow movement while

the folksy finale's tricky theme and variations revealed what virtuosos they really are.

Arguably, the best was to come in Antonin Dvorak's Eighth Symphony In G Major (Op.88), a work also associated with higher education. This was the Bohemian composer's response to his admission