

Pianists Toby Tan Kai Rong displayed technical mastery and Adrian Tang kept his cool despite rash of missed notes

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CONCERT
PRESIDENT'S YOUNG PERFORMERS
CONCERT
Singapore Symphony Orchestra
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Graced by President Tharman Shanmugaratnam, the 2024 President's Young Performers Concert by the Singapore Symphony Orchestra led by associate conductor Rodolfo Barraez was a very accessible programme built around the theme of youth and precociousness.

Opening with Felix Mendelssohn's Overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, this work of genius from a mere 17-year-old was distinguished by feathery light string playing evoking Shakespeare's realm of fairies and magical spells. Wry humour came in the form of repeated brays, musical representation of Nick Bottom's character with a donkey's head, which was milked for all its worth.

Two pianists from Yong Siew Toh Conservatory's Young Artist Programme, both students of pianist Albert Tiu, had been selected from live auditions to perform for the President.

The first was 16-year-old Toby Tan Kai Rong, who was awarded first prize at the 2023 Aarhus International Piano Competition (Denmark), in Sergei Rachmaninov's *Rhapsody On A Theme Of Paganini* (Op.43).

Seldom has someone this young left such an indelible imprint on a tried-and-tested warhorse, supremely confident yet highly nuanced was his memorable reading. Technically unimpeachable, he dispatched the harp-like Variation II and treacherously difficult runs of Variation 15 with seeming effortlessness.

Furthermore, the manner in which he built up the famous Variation 18, with restraint and no little rubato before the collective outburst of emotion, was the touch of a master. The work's thrilling climax and laconic close drew the loudest cheers, to which he reciprocated with Rachmaninov's



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Ebullient show at President's Young Performers Concert

"Little Red Riding Hood" Etude-Tableaux In A Minor (Op. 39 No. 6) as an exciting encore.

Nineteen-year-old Adrian Tang, first-prize winner of the 2023 National Piano & Violin Competition (senior category) and presently serving national service, was no less trenchant in Sergei Prokofiev's youthful First Piano

Concerto In D Flat Major (Op. 10).

In this heady mix of clashing dissonance and lush lyricism, an explosive energy characterised his opening salvo. Despite almost coming undone with a rash of missed notes, he kept his composure and never faltered thereafter.

Solid technique and steely brilliance ensured this was an exciting

16-minute ride, including a hyper-Romantic central slow section and the concerto's coruscating and breathless close. His encore of Moritz Moszkowski's *Etincelles* (Sparks) was scintillating, after which he was joined by Tan for Aram Khachaturian's *Sabre Dance* from the ballet *Gayaneh* on four hands, a gala of sweeping glissandi.

The concert closed with Prokofiev's First Symphony In D Major (Op. 25), also known as the *Classical Symphony* because it was crafted as a pastiche in the manner of the four-movement symphonies of Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Conducted by Barraez from memory, the first movement was

led at a rip-roaring pace, contrasted with a graceful *Larghetto* slow movement and a quaint *Gavotte* dressed up with a generous helping of rubato.

A blistering finale brought this enjoyable evening to an ebullient close.

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