

Extravaganza of piano music, thanks to 16 pianists and four grand pianos

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CONCERT

PIANO, FOUR-TE!

Pianists of Yong Siew Toh Conservatory
Conservatory Concert Hall
Nov 8

Sixteen pianists. Four grand pianos. There has never been such an extravaganza of piano music in Singapore, and that was made possible by the sheer concentration of piano talent that exists here today.

This celebration of the keyboard was in honour of music philanthropist and pianophile Tan Kah Tee and his wife. They have, over the years, made a generous habit of donating grand pianos to musical institutions.

Two of three grand pianos gifted to the conservatory were onstage, including a Bosendorfer and his latest present, a Fazioli F278. Joined by two Steinway Ds, the Piano, Four-te! concert opened with Russian composer Mikhail Glinka's popular Overture to *Ruslan And Ludmilla*.

The arrangement by Yong Siew Toh Conservatory of Music's head of piano studies Albert Tiu, performed by four alumni – Churen Li, Abigail Sin, Jonathan Shin and Zheng Ming En – boasted voluminous sound, yet revealed a wealth of detail and texture.

Next, the Yong Siew Toh Orchestral Institute led by Jason Lai played responsive partner to Tiu and fellow don Ning An in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Concerto For Two Pianos In E Flat Major (K.365).

Arguably the repertoire's most popular double concerto, this performance sounded freshly minted, with flowing lyrical lines and immaculate articulation. The ebullient Rondo finale, in particular, radiated an irrepressible *joie de vivre*.

Three specialists in collaborative performance – Choi Hye-seon, Liu Jia and Lim Yan – joined hands on a single keyboard to play Sergei Rachmaninov's *Waltz And Romance*, specially written for three little sisters. If one listened carefully to Lim's part, the *Romance* foretold a far greater work – his Second Piano Concerto – to come.



The Piano, Four-te! concert was in honour of music philanthropist and pianophile Tan Kah Tee and his wife. PHOTO: JELLAL KOAY LOONG CHUEN

A who's who of young pianists in Singapore worked on two pianos for Bohemian composer Bedrich Smetana's single-movement Sonata In E Minor, more salon-like than his nationalist dances.

Adriana Chiew, Gabriel Hoe, Khoo Hui Ling and Azariah Tan brought out a tonally balanced reading, highlighting robust rhythms yet possessing intimate charm.

The concert's only solo piece saw Tiu playing his own transcription of the Adagio Sostenuto slow movement from Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto, which deftly combined solo and orchestral parts to seamless effect on just two hands. Known to pop music lovers as American singer Eric Carmen's *All By Myself*, the reference was rather apt.

Serendipity and surprise came in the mysteriously titled *Improvisations For Two Pianos* from Karst de

Jong and Jonathan Shin.

After about three minutes of impressionist doodling in Debussy and Scriabinist harmonies, out from the mists emerged Yue Liang Dai Biao Wo De Xin (*The Moon Represents My Heart*), the Teresa Teng classic and favourite song of benefactor Tan's.

Lounge music will never sound the same again.

The gala concluded with Tiu's transcription of Soviet-era Russian composer Dmitri Shostakovich's populist potboiler *Festive Overture*. His labour of love involved 12 pianists on four pianos (with Koo Siaw Sing and Andren Koh joining the fray) and four percussionists conducted by Koh Kai Jie.

With the socialist realism feel-good factor dialled up to maximum effect and volume, this tremendously tuneful racket was so well-received that it had to be encores.