

Nusso bridges divide between classical and pop in stirring fashion

Chang Tou Liang

CONCERT

CROSSINGS IN SOUND

National University of Singapore
Symphony Orchestra
Yong Siew Toh Conservatory
Concert Hall
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In the opening concert of the National University of Singapore Arts Festival 2026, the National University of Singapore Symphony Orchestra (Nusso) conducted by Chan Tze Law presented a stirring programme that attempted to bridge the divide between classical music and popular forms.

Italian opera composer Gioachino Rossini's Overture To La Gazza Ladra (The Thieving Magpie) is a "lollipop", a work of lightness that early audiences could relate to as easily as popular music.

Drum rolls opened the piece, which initially strided with martial pretension, before breaking loose to reveal its true comedic intentions.

The patented Rossinian crescendo that graces all his overtures was taken deliberately, building up to a head of steam before wrapping up in a joyous conclusion.

If the orchestra had not fully warmed up, it did so in the Symphonic Dances from Leonard Bernstein's West Side Story, orchestrated by Sid Ramin and Irwin Kostal.

Without replicating the exact sequence of songs and dances in the famous musical, it brought together most of its choreographed music, melding Latin and Puerto Rican rhythms with contemporary jazzy idioms in a virtuosic orches-



(Foreground from left) Violinist David Loke, cellist Li-Wei Qin and pianist Ning An performing with the Nusso in the Crossings In Sound concert. PHOTO: NUS OFFICE OF STUDENT AFFAIRS, CENTRE FOR THE ARTS

tral showpiece.

Adding further interest were snapping fingers, a police whistle, lusty shouts of "Mambo!" and a fugue scored in jazz style.

While winds, brass and percussion were having a field day, the strings finally came into their own in the final song Somewhere, shining with a silvery sheen as the suite drew to a quiet close.

The final work was Ludwig van Beethoven's Triple Concerto In C major (Op. 56), the only concerto for piano trio (violin, cello and piano) in the active concert repertoire. For many, it was a guilty pleasure, often considered Beethoven's least serious concerto, but also the most fun to listen to.

Equally important was witnessing university students partnering and supporting Yong Siew Toh Conservatory's dons and alumnus as soloists in concert. Where amateurs could stand equally tall with seasoned professionals, it was an exchange or metaphorical crossing that was never thought possible

until recent times.

Beethoven never wrote a cello concerto, but this came closest to it with cellist Li-Wei Qin getting the plum parts and leading the way in all three movements. With violinist David Loke and pianist Ning An joining the fray, this was a spirited romp from start to finish.

With the orchestra quiet for much of the central slow movement, the trio was allowed to express itself with a luminous song-like glow. The finale's Rondo Alla Polacca, so named for its vigorous polonaise rhythm, provided a send-off that was clearly enjoyed by all in attendance.

The soloists' encore of Loke's Pre-Dawn At Harbour River, a world premiere, opened in G minor like some trio elegiaque by Rachmaninov. Then morphing into a Cantopop-like rave before breaking off abruptly as if he had run out of ink, paper and time, it drew plenty of laughs from the audience. It was a Haydn-esque way of saying, "Enough of it, that's all folks!"