



The all-Beethoven programme featured pianists Abigail Sin (left), who opened the evening with an accomplished, dramatic performance of Beethoven's third piano concerto, and Lin Xiangning (right). PHOTOS: JACK YAM

Dennis Lee Piano series kicks off with technical chops, dramatic flair

Geoffrey Lim

CONCERT

THE RESOUND COLLECTIVE DENNIS LEE PIANO SERIES 2026

Yong Siew Toh Conservatory
July 11

The inaugural concert in Resound Collective's Dennis Lee Piano Series – a series intended to showcase emerging local piano talent and named in honour of one of the great figures of Singapore pianism – commenced in wonderful style with an all-Beethoven programme featuring two exceptional performers, Abigail Sin and Lin Xiangning.

Sin, who is also a faculty member at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory, opened the evening with an accomplished, dramatic performance of Beethoven's third piano concerto, a fiery, slightly awkward work whose unusually long seven-year gestation (overlapping with both the Pathétique and Waldstein sonatas) positions it between the youthful experimentation of Beethoven's early works and the iconoclasm of his middle period. While it provides many opportunities for virtuoso display, particularly in the episodic last movement, it also requires great rhythmic control and sensitivity to texture from both soloist and orchestra to make an impression.

Sin's and the orchestra's excellent performance certainly made such an impression: Technical challenges, such as the awkward right-hand fourths after the piano's first entrance, or the brilliant unison runs in the last movement's exuberant coda, were surmounted with ease, and the plangent middle movement was played with wonderful lyricism, golden tone and great responsiveness of ensemble.

If the third concerto is a transitional work, the fourth is one of Beethoven's most radiant, life-affirming achievements in any genre and in this reviewer's entirely subjective estimation, the greatest piano concerto after Mozart.

Unfortunately, its seemingly searing piano part is a nightmare to play, with pages of perverse, exposed passages in thirds and fourths demanding equal measures of precision, agility and delicacy, and requiring the production of a full, translucent sound that

the nervous pianist can attain only through the complete relaxation of the upper body.

Lin's joyful, polished performance did more than justice to the work's technical and musical terrors, with marvellous execution of trickier passages, such as the right-hand thirds in the piano's first entrance after the tutti, and barnstorming renditions of Saint-Saëns' rarely heard cadenzas for the outer movements.

Lin also achieved an admirable quietude in the second movement, with some beautifully soulful phrasing in the piano's quasi-extemporisation following the strings' transition from angry arco dotted rhythms to muted pizzicato (the moment when Orpheus tames the wild beasts, in Liszt's programmatic narrative of the movement).

Resound Collective, which turns 10 in 2026, is one of Singapore's premier orchestral organisations and is clearly in tremendous musical health. The orchestra, led with gusto by concertmaster Yang Shuxiang and featuring the natural horns of Beethoven's day, sounded in fine fettle and played throughout with a spirit and confidence reminiscent of far more famous international ensembles.

The lack of a conductor in these difficult works created the occasional challenge, such as the tricky passage in the fourth concerto before the first movement's recapitulation where the strings have alternating off-beat accents against the piano's welter of sextuplets. But this hardly detracted from the glow of these committed, musical and hugely enjoyable performances.

The evening's emotional peak came with the strings' performance of the Cavatina from the Op. 130 string quartet, which was programmed between the concertos and triply dedicated to the memory of Dennis Lee (the Malaysian-Singaporean pianist after whom the concert series is named), Lionel Tan (the late T'ang Quartet violist) and Tan Kah Tee (the donor of the excellent Fazioli on which Sin and Lin performed).

Though the work was originally written for just four instruments, this performance for full string orchestra achieved quartet-like levels of intimacy and cohesion, with phrasing of extraordinary emotional intensity and expressive power in the sobbing "beklemmt" section. The emergence of the fourth concerto's beatific opening G major chord after the dying of the cavatina's agonised final violin line into silence was a truly magical moment. One can hardly wait for the next concert in the series.

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