

Soloists shine in concert by Nafa orchestra

REVIEW/CONCERT

NAFA ORCHESTRA WITH WILLIAM
BENNETT/Nanyang Academy of
Fine Arts Orchestra
Lee Foundation Theatre/Thursday

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The new academic semester has started for Singapore's tertiary music education institutions and it was the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts Orchestra that got the ball rolling with a concert conducted by Lim Yau.

The first music to be heard was Mozart's Overture To The Marriage Of Figaro. What was unusual here

was the placing of the woodwinds in front of the orchestra, in a semi-circle facing the conductor. These players formed the chorus that piped the celebratory music in the short and witty work and they did their job well, refusing to be overawed by the strings.

Putting the winds in the fore prepared for more of the same, which came in Mozart's popular Concerto For Flute & Harp In C Major (K.299) with celebrated veteran British flautist William Bennett and young Singaporean harpist Sarah Wong as soloists. The sheer ebullience and total agreeability of the music had an ideal advocate in Bennett, who is amazingly nimble at 80 years old.

His warm and sweet tone was a

joy to hear, as was his crystal-clear articulation in the florid and running solo passages. He found a good match in Wong's scintillating harp part, which served as additional accompaniment to the orchestra's.

The two also blended well in cadenzas by Carl Reinecke in the three movements, which gave both soloists further opportunities to shine while the orchestra remained tacit.

The slow movement was lush in its lingering lyricism while the finale romped home with the most joyous kicks in the steps. Clearly Mozart was the draw of the concert, as swathes of seats were vacant during the second half's offering of Cesar

Franck's Symphony In D Minor.

Conductor Lim first thanked those in the audience who stayed on and then good-naturedly lectured them on how to properly support the orchestral players with prolonged applause as they emerged. And the orchestra rewarded the audience with passionate playing.

The first movement's pivotal three-note motif was voiced with clarity by lower strings and the Wagnerian movement grew organically, building to a feverish high with the strings sounding particularly rich. This accomplished even greater plethoric climaxes when the full complement of brass joined in.

The slow movement came like a re-

lief from the earlier congestion with Tan Li Shan's harp and Joost Flach's cor anglais conjuring a balm for the ears, accompanied by pizzicato strings. Elsewhere, the excellent and well-honed strings also generated a sense of tension with their tricky sinuous contrapuntal figures.

The finale was a given a life-affirming lick with Lim's firm but not over-rigid direction.

The ecstatic main theme was vitality itself, and as with Franck's cyclic form of symphonic writing, themes from the earlier movements returned like the reassuring hugs of long-lost friends. All this made for a busy denouement and the inevitable blazing conclusion.